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The Bloomsbury Companion to Hindu Studies

Edited by

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Preface and Acknowledgements

This volume aims to highlight key debates, new perspectives, methodological tools and future possibilities for research in the study of Hindu traditions. As such it is not aiming at a comprehensive introduction, but rather a 'companion' that can be used by students and scholars to throw new light onto material, and refine current approaches. Such a project could expand indefinitely to reflect the work that is being done on newly emerging manuscripts and hitherto-unexplored practices; in comparison with that widening horizon of research, and due to the contingent limitations of the project, the present volume inevitably contains gaps. The brief summary of regional traditions invites treatment in greater depth in a longer edited volume. Space has been given to Tantric traditions at the expense of the Vedas, in recognition of the need to balance the prevalent 'Vedic' conception of Hinduism with awareness of the equal – and in many cases stronger – influence that the Tantric constellation of ideas and practices have had on popular belief and worship among the majority of today's Hindus. More could be said on Hindu philosophical and theological ideas; given the current flourishing of historical, political and sociological approaches, a balanced scholarly attention to salvific and metaphysical beliefs is also desirable as a 'future direction'.

The book uses the standard transliteration of Indian alphabets, except in the use of some proper names, place names, titles, adjectives or popular anglicizations.

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Foreword

When we survey the cultures of South Asia that have become known as Hinduism, we are struck by the long histories involved in their formation, the broad sweep of the political and economic trajectories in which these traditions were formed and the innumerable stories of the people who lived through them. The story of Hinduism from one perspective is the story of the communities of solidarity with investment in a particular worldview, set of texts and spiritual practices that they perceived to be of vital importance for their community. Often these communities of solidarity were in conflict and one became subordinated or incorporated into another, but out of this complexity, coherent social structures and patterns of organizing knowledge emerged over a period of almost two thousand years up to what we might call the early medieval period when the deities, practices and architecture that we associate with contemporary Hinduism clearly emerged. Sacred texts, particularly the revealed scripture of the Veda but also traditions in vernacular languages, were passed through the generations and were received and made to live by each new generation. The Tamil poems of the Āḻvārs are still sung in Tamil Nadu as are the songs of Mirabai in the Punjab; Brahmins still perform the sacred thread ceremony and some still renounce the world to seek a goal beyond worldly success. For many Hindus the present life is part of a much broader picture and might continue into future lives in different forms. But this does not mean that Hindu traditions are divorced from day to day living; quite the contrary, Hindu forms of worship have informed people's daily lives from mundane activities such as cooking a meal, to getting married, to beginning a business enterprise and to political action. Indeed, in the contemporary world the term 'Hindu' is sometimes associated with a conservative political ideology that sees 'Hinduness' (*hindutva*) as the heart of India as a nation, a vision that for many has had negative social consequences.

While the importance of Hinduism for national and international politics should not be underestimated, this book uses the term 'Hindu' in a much broader fashion and indeed rescues it from that rather narrow designation. What have become known as Hindu traditions are essentially communities

who pass what they regard as important knowledge through the generations; it is important for living a good life, important for realizing the 'legitimate' goals of success, pleasure and virtue, important for paying our debts to the past and important for facing the future. These ways of life have brought people into community with each other and have provided the resources for the successful construction of life from birth, through marriage and family, to death. The term 'Hinduism' has come to designate different communities of solidarity that are distinct from each other and yet related by shared concerns, shared structures and common practices.

This book is a welcome contribution to the way we understand Hinduism in its complexity, the way it has been understood and academically studied and the way it needs to be approached in future scholarship. Here we find accounts of these different communities united by devotion (*bhakti*), for example, or by Tantric revelation, along with a history of the scholarly reception of the texts, communities and practices in the history of South Asia in each of the academic disciplines. Dr. Frazier and the other scholars involved in this project have presented a fresh and original approach that seeks to give a vision of Hinduism in its complexity and continuity, integrated with a reflection on the processes and methods of study. This book should be widely read.

Gavin Flood

1 Introduction: New Visions of Hinduism

Chapter Outline

This volume is dedicated to new visions of Hinduism, and what they tell us about religion and culture as a whole. In a time in which scholarship in the study of religion is simultaneously facing serious challenges and promising advances, the field of Hindu Studies is emerging as an exemplary model for religious studies. The rich complexity of the Hindu tradition, or as we may now say in the plural, *traditions,* has inspired scholars in the field to develop sophisticated concepts and methods, and ever-more innovative skills in research. This volume aims to reflect these critical advances in Hindu Studies by viewing it through the lens of scholars who do not defer to the biases or blind-spots of past scholarship. Instead they aim to construct new ways of looking at religious culture itself. Increasingly holistic approaches are revealing both the *complexity* and the *consistency* of the linked religious cultures we call Hinduism.

A decade ago, undergraduates were told that there was nothing one could say about Hinduism – nothing unreservedly true. The religious cultures of the Indian subcontinent together with its diaspora communities in Asia, Africa, Europe and America are so old, so diverse, so vast in their geographical and linguistic reach, so intricate in their inter-weaving cultural influences, that every observation seemed subject to death by a thousand qualifications. Scholars such as Von Stietencron have even denied that there is such a thing as Hindu-'ism' (Von Stietencron, 1997, pp. 32–53), usefully deconstructing the idea that India has a single monolithic tradition bound by adherence to an overarching institution or a set of common doctrines. This tradition of questioning 'Hinduism' is a useful strategy for correcting a century of scholars who tried to reify the many Indian religious traditions into a single culture. But it can also be a risky strategy in the long term. Exposing past notions of 'Hinduism' as a 'nebulous abstraction' (Flood, 2003, p. 1) requires that one replace them with a better way of understanding the religious cultures that have grown out of India. Fresh foundations are needed for future growth.

Thus there has been a move to reclaim 'Hinduism' as a valid term of reference. It describes a family of religious cultures that is connected by shared concepts, ritual grammars, textual resources and forms of practice. While they do not constitute a single homogeneous tradition, they are linked by common threads that bind them into a cultural entity of a different, more dynamic and diverse kind. To this end the word 'Hinduism' itself can be reappropriated. It has its origins in the Persian name for those inhabiting the Indian subcontinent, designating them as people living beyond the river (the '*Sind*' – referring in this case to the now dry Indus river in modern Pakistan). Thus it is not a natural self-designation growing from within the culture to which it refers, but rather one that was initially used by other cultures as part of a discourse of conflict and contrast (J. O'Connell, 1973, p. 340).

Yet one could argue that the geographical character of the word reflects the idea that Hinduism should be defined in terms of geographically delineated cultural origins, rather than specific doctrines. The notion of 'Hinduism' as the religious culture of the people living in the subcontinental peninsula beyond the Indus river valley, emphasizes its relation to the many changing peoples who have moved into, within and out of the Indian subcontinent. This way of looking at Hinduism makes no hard and fast separation from Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Parsi, Muslim, Christian, tribal and other religious cultures that exist in India and Indian diaspora communities. But it encourages us to use 'Hindu' as an adjective for cultural features and for individuals, rather than to assume that the word refers to a single continuous entity. So if 'Hinduism' is to be validly reappropriated in an informed manner, how should we best use the term now?

Recognizing Complexity: Hindu Diversity

> *Heterogeneity and processes of bricolage, mixture, syncretism or hybridisation are not merely the consequence of external cultural interaction, migration and travel . . . but situated at the very heart of religious and cultural life.*
>
> *(Flugel, 2005, p. 1)*

In response to the question: 'What is Hinduism?' recent scholars have sought an improved understanding of what kind of noun 'Hinduism' is. Names do not only define univocal objects, movements or doctrines; they can also refer to complexes, collections, families, tendencies and characteristics – offering us quite different ways in which to understand what it is we are referring to when we speak of 'Hinduism'. Brian Smith has also reminded us that such a definition is not fixed, but shifts according to the experiences, interests and traditions of the person who employs it, relative to the purpose for which the word is used (Smith, pp. 741–9). Julius Lipner has reminded us that India has its own approach to definitions, allowing us to see them as *bahurūpa,* 'many-formed' or in Jain terminology, *anekānta,* 'not-single-ended' (Lipner, 2010, pp. 2–3). This multiplicity need not signify fragmentation and disunity. Louis Dumont was one of the first to suggest that what may appear to be radically different forms of religious life, such as the ethical concerns of the king, the ritual province of the brahmin and the liberatory goals of the renouncer, can all act as complementary components of a coherent religious culture (Dumont, 1970 [1966]). Parallel paths and structural oppositions link many of the different aspects of Hindu culture, furnishing a range of options which accommodate the diverse aspects of Indian society. Difference can be as binding as sameness.

Hinduism can be seen as an 'arc-culture' consisting of many traditions that weave in and out of each other through different historical periods. It can be likened to a rope of cultural movements, woven from many threads, some longer and some shorter, entering at different points in history. These threads, which originate in different regions and different periods, entwine and influence each other creating a tradition with inner diversity and considerable flexibility. Sometimes these micro-traditions imitate and adopt each other; sometimes they oppose each other and inspire reactionary developments. But this interaction of traditions over the millennia which has created a shared cultural resource of ideas and practices can be designated, in total, as 'Hinduism'.

Scholars have used a range of images to cast light on the unusual structural complexity of Hinduism. It can be a potpourri (Michaels, 2004, p. 3), a banyan growing in its unique polycentric manner (Lipner, 2010, p. 2), a net (Eck, 1985, p. 25), a 'proliferating jungle' (Zaehner, 1962, p. 3), a complete environment or

a family (Klostermaier, 2007, p. 11) and even a 'supersaturated solution' in which traditions and texts coalesce like crystals (Doniger, 2009), a multi-flavoured 'pan of lasagna' (Glucklich, 2008, p. 5) or the 'kaleidoscope of divinity' that one finds in the many different shrines within a single Hindu temple (Kinsley, 1993, p. 3). It encompasses both a 'Hellenistic' way of life and a 'Judaic' religious system (Zaehner, 1962, p. 3). It may perhaps only be a concept constructed by foreigners as a way to collectively comprehend, discredit and dominate the real religious cultures found in the Indian subcontinent as Gauri Visvanathan and others have suggested. But if it is only an idea imagined by Western colonialists and academics, subsequent scholars must work to relate Hinduism more accurately to the reality to which it refers, continuing to widen and enrich the concept itself.

Approaches to Complexity

These images all demonstrate that it has become necessary to be analytically precise about *types* of complex cultural structures. In the field of sociology scholars have developed a range of models that can be applied in the Indian context. Much of the diversity of Hinduism is due to '*creolization*', the process by which an indigenous population creatively incorporates incoming cultures into its own. It provides an apt model for the processes by which Muslim religious ideas and Persian arts were incorporated into Hindu traditions in Mughal India, and perhaps also for the earlier adaptation of Ancient Near Eastern influences as ingredients in an indigenous Vedic culture. The notion of '*hybridity*' highlights the combinatorial character of Hinduism, drawing on multiple regional micro-cultures that are themselves dynamic mixtures with permeable boundaries. Hybridity can be seen to characterize certain Keralan religious cultures in their combination of Sanskritic textual and ritual traditions seen elsewhere in the subcontinent, with the charismatic and emotional religiosity of possession rituals. It can also be seen in the Tantric tradition's creative assimilation of indigenous elements from brahminical ritual, yogic practice and village worship of feminine deities and energies, or in the Early-Modern Vedāntic philosophers' use of Sāṃkhya ideas.

'*Syncretism*', once accorded negative connotations, can also be defined as the natural process of selection and synthesis by which Hindus like other religious groups have blended existing ideas into their own unique thought and practice. Thus, for instance, the Vedāntic *sampradāyas* of early modern India can be seen as highly syncretic in their conscious appropriation of Vedic, yogic, brahminical, Tantric and even Muslim elements to develop new arts and theologies. '*Cosmopolitanism*' or intensive urban interaction has characterized cultural flourishing in the cities of successive empires, from the Mauryas to the

Guptas, and the Mughals to the Raj. Others have also noted that the intellectual culture of Hinduism is marked by a distinctive '*trans-regionalism*' in which ideas were spread across political, linguistic and geographical boundaries by ambulatory ascetic groups, travelling gurus or saints, traders, pilgrims and wandering reciters who disseminated poetry and epics across a wide area. These and other ways of understanding the particular forms that cultural complexity takes within 'Hinduism' continue to emerge in contemporary scholarship.

Rather than define Hinduism as a more diverse religion with a greater degree of dynamic change than the 'religions of the book', which tend to be seen as unified in creedal assent to key propositions, one can see it as strongly characterized by the contextual adaptation that is present in all living religious traditions. Geertz and Gellner's work on Islamic cultural particularism, and recent studies of contemporary creative developments in Asian and African Christianity, show that similar processes are at work across all religions. To speak of any religion as 'living' is to speak of it as defined by the normal historical processes of adaptation to the exigencies of lived reality.

In addition, India has developed its own indigenous ways of conceptualizing its own complexity and ordering it into manageable structures. In the words of Michel Foucault, a historian who sought to understand different human 'strategies' for organizing complexity into coherence, Hinduism, like Hindu Studies, seeks 'certain organisations of concepts, certain regroupings of objects, certain types of enunciation, which form, according to their degree of coherence, rigour, and stability, themes or theories' (Foucault, 1972, p. 64). One such strategy in Indian thinking is *categorization*, a structure which we find in the *varṇa* and *jāti* categories which organize social identity, in the sectarian deity or guru affiliations that organize devotional identity, in the categorization of philosophical systems into 'perspectives' (*darśanas*) and elsewhere. Such categorizations proliferate as categories are sub-divided, but the infinitely expanding archival classification which categorizations afford is widely employed within Hindu cultures. Hierarchies allow categorial classifications to encode values within the scheme, but often such systematizations, once set up, must incorporate added mechanisms of fluidification and flexibility that make them serviceable in relation to the varied and changing texture of real life. These include rituals of purification and penance that allow for transgression of caste divisions (O'Hanlon, 2009), and the infinitely repeatable descent of divinities in ever-new forms.

In many ways 'Hinduism' is only a schematized version of the complexity of the religious lives of the actual persons through history who collectively constitute the traditions we call 'Hindu'. Axel Michaels argues that the main focus of scholarly study should be the flexible folk Hinduism of 'the village'; emphasizing the way in which the lived reality of religion gives a much more complex context to the fixed nature of the written doctrines that are applied in it

(Michaels, 2004). As Madeleine Biardeau points out, this means that we cannot hope for any idea of Hinduism that is total and all-encompassing (Biardeau, 1989). The conscientious scholar learns to work towards unveiling that which remains to be discovered, incorporating into their theories the fact that some things may never be known. But with the necessary cautions in place, the field is regaining its grasp on what is distinctive about 'Hindu' cultures, in their fluid relation with each other, and with the other religions that have flourished in the Indian subcontinent.

Continuity: The Binding Structures of Hinduism

Despite the complexity of Hindu culture, it has definite structures of continuity and coherence that are often overlooked; without them the subject-matter of 'Hindu Studies' would not exist at all. Scholars are paying increasing attention to the way in which religious ideas, symbols, practices and styles are able to spread through different communities over time, linking them in a fluid and shifting shared culture. On this model, Hinduism can be seen as a 'religious imaginaire' (Flood, 2003, p. 200), from which various groups borrowed to craft new religious forms. This creativity fuelled change, but Flood notes that there were also 'uniting features that cut across these diachronic processes, such as pilgrimage to sacred centres, particularly great regional temples, ritual offerings to deities in concrete form (*mūrti*), devotion (*bhakti*), and the practice of textual exegesis by scholars in centers of learning' (Flood, 2003, p. 4).

Thus it is possible to highlight certain 'themes' in the Foucauldian sense of useful and illuminating organizations of diversity. Such themes are not universally identical, nor is each found in every tradition, text or locale. Sometimes they are explicit doctrines, sometimes practices, sometimes motifs in art or myth and sometimes merely shared concerns that are addressed in different ways. In some cases these commonalities are caused by historical factors: one movement, however different its outlines, grows out of another, or out of a common source. In other cases they are typological: trends spread and inspire the development of similar practices, ideas and structures. Other continuities may concern shared identities; two dissimilar groups may claim the same lineage, teacher, textual or cultural affiliation. Some continuities are real and some are ideal: scholars such as Madeleine Biardeau sought to study the ways in which Indian cultures have constructed an ideal of themselves as a single tradition, a timeless order or *sanātana dharma* premised on the eternal Vedas (Biardeau, 1989). Such ideas are themselves an important object for study.

These recurring conceptual features link the different branches of Hindu culture through a lexicon of shared ideas, practices, linguistic and visual texts, spiritual techniques and styles of worship. One hopes that future scholarship

will add to any such list. With each new form of continuity we learn a new way in which 'Hinduism' exists. The broad themes that follow aim to offer some hermeneutic keys to the vast house of Hinduism.

Indic Cosmology

Cosmology, while it is often ignored in Western conceptions of religiosity, forms an overarching framework that spans diverse regions, languages and religions within Indic culture. The cosmological picture of the universe as a series of hierarchically structured demonic, earthly and heavenly worlds, through which sentient creatures move via the natural process of reincarnation, links not only most Hindu traditions, but also Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. This shared picture of the cosmos forms a framework upon which different systems of metaphysics and soteriology can be hung. As Malinar notes in her essay in the present volume, the assimilation and synthesis of new ideas into an existing cosmological picture lent those ideas a naturalistic air of truth, placing them beyond the reach of the usual sectarian rhetoric and debate.

Hierarchy is a common binding feature of many Indian cosmological accounts. A wide range of texts from the *Ṛg Veda* to the Upaniṣads, the *Bhagavad Gītā* and the Purāṇas portray the universe as ordered into a number of worlds inhabited by nominally 'higher' and 'lower' beings, from deities to demons. Certain Upaniṣads divide the world into heavens, sky and earth, and elsewhere into the worlds of humans, ancestors and gods (*Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.5.16). This tripartite division is expanded in late Vedic texts into seven increasingly heavenly worlds, and in the multi-layered cosmology of the Purāṇas, the upper higher spheres are mirrored by lower demonic worlds. Many Purāṇas also enumerate hierarchical divisions of time, adding a chronological hierarchy of cosmic ages that progress and degrade through stages of varying virtue.

To these spatial and temporal hierarchies, a moral hierarchy is added, in evidence from the period in which the Upaniṣads were composed, which assumes a causal law linking good and bad causes with consonant good and bad effects. Humanity, by its sentient nature, came to be seen as subject to *karma,* which operates much like a law of physics that is intrinsic to the fabric of the world. The concept of *karma* holds that according to the degree to which an action fulfils the *dharma* of the agent, it creates equal reactions affecting his or her rebirth in subsequent lives. The doctrine of *karma's* 'ethicization of cosmic processes' (Olivelle, 1996, p. xlvii) took root not only among Hindu brahminical and Tantric groups, but also in Buddhist and Jain traditions.[1] In Hindu ascetic traditions rebirth was counterpoised to liberation, and in *bhakti* traditions it was annexed to the many conceptions of heaven that were favoured by different theistic sects. Yet while the nature of these ultimate goals differed, the basic

notion of a path of progress through a hierarchically graded universe as the route to reaching them, remained standard throughout most Advaitic, Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava and Śākta traditions.

The belief in cosmic structures such as these may have appealed to society because it lent apparent order to a chaotic world of floods, disease, famine and war. Conversely these cosmological structures may be reflections of a real-life order: Burton Stein explains the well-defined hierarchical structure of Indic cosmology as a mythic echo of the feudal government that prevailed in North Indian kingdoms developing during the first millennium BCE (Stein, 1980). Today belief in an ideal cosmic, social and ethical order of *dharma* transcends most sectarian boundaries and is also found in Buddhist, Jain, Sikh and other traditions in the subcontinent. Barbara Holdrege points out that *dharma* was originally conceived, at least in part, as the essential nature of things, which could be intuited by truth-seeking persons (Holdrege, 2004, pp. 213–14). This gives the idea an intuitive appeal, supported in the Vedas by homologies drawn from nature that imply that *dharma* is what upholds and explains different aspects of the physical universe such as stars, seasons, physical geography or human physiology. Thus *dharma* fits with our empirical experience of 'laws' of nature, both *describing* how things are, and *prescribing* the way they should be. In the modern period, as Indian cosmologies encounter the cosmology of the 'natural sciences', Hindu views of the universe may begin to alter from the past template to a greater degree.

Textual Traditions

Great families of literature have flowed around the Indian subcontinent over the last three millennia, transmitted largely in the form of memorized verse, but also in the written medium of manuscripts and epigraphs in Sanskrit and other major languages of India. These texts have formed literary genres with their own distinctive styles, histories, patronage and customs of transmission. Some of these genres are associated with particular communities or movements, as in the connection of particular sections of the Vedas to brahmin families, of Sūtras to specific intellectual 'schools' or orientations, of heroic narratives to the Kṣatriya culture of tribal chiefs, of Purāṇas to traditions of theistic worship, of Tantras to groups that defined themselves in contrast to brahminical orthodoxy and of devotional poetry and hagiography to *sampradāyas* or sects centred on particular saints. In some cases these literatures remained closely attached to those groups, through mechanisms of initiation or esoteric coding, and have only recently become accessible to Hindu society at large, and to scholars from outside the tradition.

Nonetheless many of these genres have been sufficiently mobile in their transmission across regions, religious orientations and social strata to have formed a wide-ranging resource for religious thought and practice. The Vedas, Sūtras, Śāstras, Tantras, Itihāsa, Purāṇas, Kāvya, the 'songs' of poets, pamphlets of reformers and further textual traditions, all form a template on which divergent groups have drawn. The Sūtras, for instance, established a 'house-style' for systematic philosophical reflection that consisted of condensed aphoristic sentences expressing default rules, qualified by exceptions and meta-rules for their correct application. The adoption of this format by competing schools enabled them to communicate, compare and refine their views in a way that contributed greatly to the creation of a shared intellectual milieu that encompassed thinkers of many different periods and orientations. Sometimes, as with the devotional poetry of the medieval and early modern periods, standard literary forms were both followed and flaunted in acts of stylistic creativity. But whether followed or not, the expectations of genre incorporated the audience and the poets into the same shared discourse, without which intellectual culture remains fragmented, and development slow.

It has been argued that Hinduism has no 'Bible', no core text unifying the different traditions. But these numerous textual genres have formed a shared source of religious ideas, mediated through traditions of performance, reading and commentary. Hindus have returned to them again and again across periods and sectarian boundaries, and they have been instrumental in linking the diversity of 'Hindu' religious expression into a continuous shared culture.

Spiritual Techniques

While there is certainly no single practice that is universal in Hindu traditions, a constellation of spiritual techniques have become inter-related by combination and association through history, usually involving the disciplined transformation of the mind or body. These have been combined and harnessed to a range of different religious goals, forming an important source of commonality within Hinduism and the religions with which it has interacted. These techniques are most evident in yogic and Tantric practices which include mental focus, physical control, antinomian or 'taboo' activities, ecstatic states and emotional intensification, divine possession, visualization of other realities, and ritual reconstruction of the self. Such practices came to pervade a wide range of Indian religious traditions in different forms and for different purposes.[2] The roots of these methods probably predate the classical texts of Yoga and Tantra. As technologies for transforming the psycho-physical human person, they offered a rich shared resource of *experiences* that complement texts, rituals and

doctrines. They enabled religious activity to take place in parallel landscapes of the mind and body, and introduced an emphasis on mental focus that could be channelled into goals of self-discipline, purification, detachment, divinization, reconstruction into other selves or relocation into other worlds.

The techniques used to achieve these goals required that the practitioner possess very specific skills that could only be acquired through extensive guided training. These could include fasting and breath control, withdrawal of the senses from the external world, meditative focus (*dhyāna*) and absorption, induced ecstasies and possession (*āveśa*) by supernatural beings, either abstinence or controlled intake of heterodox substances including alcohol, meat and sexual fluids, elaborate rituals aimed at the construction of a new 'subtle' body and the artful cultivation of emotions or alternative identities according to the methods described by Sanskrit aesthetic philosophy. In these techniques, which were deployed in various combinations by Hindu groups over time, one can detect many possible sources. Heesterman and Biardeau have argued for the development of techniques of 'inner' control out of the careful discipline required for Vedic rituals (Heesterman, 1985, p. 40; Biardeau, 1989, p. 159). Indian shamanic and tribal cultures remained influential on Hindu ritual and devotion (Samuels, 2008, pp. 233–5), and possession practices, once only associated with tribal traditions and thought to have a tenuous connection with Hinduism, are now recognized as a more pervasive theme of South Asian cultures influencing rituals, devotional arts and even the medical sciences (Frederick Smith, 2006).

One of the themes seen throughout these many techniques is an emphasis on what can be achieved through disciplined control and manipulation of the mental and physical self. Samuels speaks of the renunciatory tradition in terms of 'an ideal of a heroic struggle against the emotional entanglements and deep-seated volitional impulses of ordinary life' (Samuels, 2008, p. 173) and this confident reflection on the possible extent of our own self-control and self-transformation is a distinctive feature of many traditions. Bhakti devotees, Mahāyāna Buddhists, Sikhs and even Sufi Muslims gradually appropriated elements of Yoga, spreading techniques of meditation and physical transformation as far east as Buddhist Japan and as far west as Islamic Morocco.

Ritual, Symbol and Structure

Across India and throughout the diaspora, Hindus draw on a lexicon of recognizable ritual acts and symbols that undercut doctrinal difference, uniting Hindus in a community of actions. Frits Staal has even suggested that 'it is not what one thinks, but rather what one does' – the way in which one's life is structured by certain rituals – that makes one a Hindu (Staal, 1989, p. 389). His

own work has helped to reveal the continuity between ancient and modern Vedic rituals in Hinduism. A life ordered and sacralized by significant 'ritual' actions is a desideratum in almost all Hindu traditions. *Saṃskāra* life-stage rituals mark transition in one's stage of life, and social customs concerning food, space, behaviour and dress express relationships between persons. Pūjā rituals of reverence for deities define worship at temples and shrines, and rituals of consecration and installation transform concrete images (a *mūrti* or *vigraha*) into media of divine presence. *Dīkṣā* initiation rituals are seen as being able to transform the individual and establish a new religious identity. These and other rituals act to bring society into a correct and auspicious state.

Many of the actions, symbols and images used form a common cultural vocabulary comprising features such as *mudrā* hand gestures, geometric *maṇḍala* symbols, *mūrti* images, powerful substances such as ash, dye, smoke, milk, and ghee, and even aural symbols such as the ringing of bells and the sacred syllable 'Om'. Practitioners can draw on this shared lexicon of ritual forms to construct a ritual event that correctly responds to the context, taking into account time, place, the customs associated with a particular deity, and place in life or society. Frits Staal has noted that ritual changes more slowly than explicit conceptual debate, and that they therefore also contribute to continuity between different periods and communities (Staal, 1983); the continuity of ritual actions can even come to express the continuity of the tradition itself. In the process of transmission, ritual 'vocabulary' may take on different meanings, and the original significance of a particular action may be lost over time. But this also means that a ritual can adapt to remain vividly significant in new contexts.

Although variations in ritual often embody social or religious differences, they also unite the community by expressing those differences as part of an overall system, a structured grammar of co-existence that prevents difference from causing conflict in the community. Ritual structures can act as a non-propositional linking discourse, enabling different communities to communicate regardless of difference in language, culture or belief. Pilgrimage sites are a good place in which to observe the trans-regional continuity of ritual, and general patterns of temple ritual in most areas are similar enough that most Hindus in unfamiliar regions will know what to do when performing *pūjā* in the nearest temple. This common vocabulary and syntax form an important structure of continuity across ever more diffuse communities, countries and cultures.

Divine Embodiment

The idea that the divine can become embodied in (but not limited to) a concrete physical form is found in a wide range of traditions within Hinduism, providing a world-affirming counterpoint to the renunciatory tendencies of yogic

detachment. Indeed, as well as statues and images, even persons, places, temples and other concrete objects can be seen as manifestations of divine reality, offering a concrete point of access to the divine through 'the congealing of form and limit from that larger reality that has no form or limit' (Eck, 1981, p. 38). Where once scholars thought of Hindu conceptions of the divine as 'polytheistic', 'pantheistic' or 'monistic', using Vedic and Vedāntic texts as their source, more recently the idea of divine *embodiment* has been proposed as a better model for Hindu views of the divine presence within the physical world. By conceiving of the divine as a fluid presence that can manifest in varying forms and places, Hindu traditions have been able to combine worship of personalistic deities with a belief that the divine is without limit or qualification, and omnipresent throughout the universe.

This has supported a distinctive 'aesthetics of presence' in popular Hindu worship (Davis, 1997, p. 33), offering an alternative to the otherworldly emphasis of the renouncer traditions, and underlying common practices such as the focus on *mūrtis* in daily *pūjā*, pilgrimage to divine 'abodes' that are seen not only as locations but as manifestations of the divine, possession rituals, Tantric processes of self-divinization, and stories of gods manifesting as the heroes of epic literatures and the saints of popular hagiography. This alternative perspective suggests, for instance, that the early medieval Tamil poetry of the Āḻvār saints and its heritage of vivid, worldly imagery, is as important an ingredient in Hindu religion, as is the Sanskritic philosophical reflection found in the *Upaniṣads*, *Bhagavad Gītā* and *Brāhma Sūtra.*

Unity and Plurality

Given the range of India's religious thought and practice, it is not surprising that Hindu culture has developed ways of thinking that allow one to incorporate differences within overarching frameworks. From pluralistic conceptions of ultimate reality as taking many forms, to social structures that incorporate diverse lifestyles, and texts or temples that accommodate the worship of many different deities, such systems have been invaluable in a society that has continuously combined different traditions. The prevalence of such structures of 'unitive' thinking may have a socio-historical origin in the feudal complexity that characterized the Indian state in its formative period. But the structures themselves reach beyond social theory to the spheres of ontology, epistemology, ethics and aesthetics.

Texts and artworks often span difference; the *Bhagavad Gītā,* for instance, is a text that aims to reconcile householders and renouncers, and brahmins and kṣatriyas, while integrating theistic devotion to the God Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇā, with Vedāntic and Sāṃkhya metaphysics that described a pure divine reality devoid

of qualities. Similarly, the Upaniṣads, *Mahābhārata* and Purāṇas appear to incorporate multiple sources into a single text. The architecture of Hindu temples provides a concrete manifestation of this characteristic polycentric structure: their multiple shrines are designed in such a way that they allow attention to many gods to be integrated into a focus on one. In so doing they form a practical way for communities and families with members who have diverse devotional affiliations, to be united at a single religious location in a single experience of worship. Even symbols and iconographies allow for a similar integration: in visual images a deity may sometimes 'borrow' another god's symbols, and Geoffrey Samuels describes the concentric shapes of the *maṇḍala* as a symbol which gives a 'sense of the outer elements as emanations or projections of an underlying unity' (Samuels, 2008, p. 225).

This pattern of plurality-in-unity is applied to the divine itself, as when Śiva explains in the *Śiva Purāṇa* that Viṣṇu, in his role as creator, is merely one form of himself, and that even in his own highest being he contains multiple levels as a personal lord (*īśvara*) and a cosmic reality (symbolized by the abstract shape of the *liṅgam*). Samuels suggests that this conception of deities as arc-identities into which other deities can be assimilated, reflects sociological shifts towards a Hobbesian ideal of kingship in which individuals are seen as 'dividuals': 'subordinate parts of a greater whole – and sharing their substance with the wider whole' (Samuels, 2008, p. 207). This is in marked contrast to the Western scholastic notion of the divine as immutable and radically indivisible in its essence (possessed of 'divine simplicity').

Thus in worship the believer is routinely offered many religious focal points rather than only one. Differences often correspond to sectarian diversification and regional variation. Yet as C. J. Fuller points out, the proliferation of divinities and sects remains premised on an underlying commonality:

> Vishnu and Shiva as such are relatively little worshiped by very large numbers of Hindus, especially in rural areas, but without taking proper account of the two great gods, it is impossible to make sense of Bhairava, Shitala Mata, or any other little deity, and impossible to comprehend the relationships among different deities and their forms. These relationships which define the structure of the whole – the pantheon of deities in the widest sense – are built on difference, but difference emergent from a polytheistic logic of fluid continuity. (Fuller, 1992, pp. 56–7)

Thus, for instance, the proliferation of Vaiṣṇava sects across North India from the late medieval period was facilitated by the possibility of each group claiming a new facet of Viṣṇu as their focus, with Vallabha's Puṣṭimārg focusing on Viṣṇu's incarnation as the child Kṛṣṇa, the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition emphasizing Viṣṇu's consort Lakṣmī, the Radhavallābhis worshipping Kṛṣṇa's consort Rādhā

as the truest form of Viṣṇu, and the Caitanya Vaiṣṇavas holding that the ecstatic saint Caitanya was a combined form of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Despite this variation, all remain Vaiṣṇavas, and the sense of a shared religious culture that this creates is evident in the wide popularity of hagiographic tales that tell of how saints in one Vaiṣṇava tradition paid homage to the authority of saints from others whenever they met in the course of wanderings and teaching.

Authority and Questioning

Sources of authority play an important part in Hindu culture. In the family and the community, elders and priests play an important role, but in the Sanskrit tradition religious authority is concentrated in *śruti*, eternal truths that were 'heard' by sages then passed down through oral or written tradition as texts with the power to command reverence and adherence from successive generations. This 'scriptural' form of Hindu literature is epitomized by the Vedas, but its status is extended to other texts that claim an origin in revelation, such as the *Mahābhārata* (which claims to be the fifth Veda), and also the 'visionary' literature of *bhakti* saints and the revelations contained in Tantric texts transmitted by mediums who are said to be possessed by a deity. This grounding of religious life in the experience of a person believed to have unique access to truth – a sage, guru, saint, medium or avatāra – is a pervasive feature of Hinduism.

Yet powerful instances of questioning and debate are also present in the Hindu tradition as a persistent challenge to the most authoritative texts and persons; they could even be said to be typical of Indian theological discourse. A proleptic discourse in the speculative tenth book of the *Ṛg Veda* asks about the origins of the universe: 'What covered in, and where? And what gave shelter? Was water there, unfathomed depth of water? Who really knows and who here can declare it, whence it was born and whence flows this creation?' (*Ṛg Veda* 10.129). This process of questioning foreshadows a constructive method of dialectical reflection that is seen again and again throughout Indian history (Brereton, 1999). The Upaniṣads challenged their Vedic heritage through narratives that involved questioning between generations, as in the father–son discussion of Uddālaka and Śvetaketu; between husband and wife, as in the conversation between Yajñāvalkya and Maitreyī; between teachers and pupils as in the questioning of Pippalada; and between different castes or members of the court, as in the dialogue of Yājñvalkya the sage and King Janaka, or the kṣatriya Agatasatru and the brahmin Gargya – who begins as the teacher and ends up as the pupil. This ethos of questioning even extends into the world of the gods, as when the abstract divinity of Brahman establishes its superiority over Agni, Indra and the other Vedic gods by questioning them. In the later *Śiva Purāṇa*, Śiva establishes his superiority over Viṣṇu and Brahmā by questioning

them, and Viṣṇu subsequently admits Śiva as his guru. Such interrogation gives a name to the *Kena Upaniṣad* which repeatedly asks *kena*, 'by what' power or reason is something the case, while in the conversations between Nachiketas and Yama in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, and Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gītā*, questioning appears as a way for the guru to test the pupil, encouraging repeated criticism of the supposed authority's inferior answers, in such a way that the pupil eventually arrives at a 'true answer'.

Doubts of many kinds play a persistent role in the *Mahābhārata*, and in later Kṛṣṇa literatures such as the *Gītagovinda* of Jayadeva, one sees challenge transformed into outright criticism from Kṛṣṇa's lover Rādhā – yet this criticism is welcomed and encompassed within the dynamics of devotion.

This affirmation of debate reflects the vigorous intellectual culture that was patronized by many royal courts. Stories of kings questioning holy men are found even beyond Hindu texts, as in the Buddhist '*Questions of King Milinda*', and the multi-religious discussions in which theologians were asked questions by the Muslim Emperor Akbar. This give and take of debate was reflected in the thesis-objection-response structure of classical philosophical and theological treatises, which were themselves subject to the tacit inquisition of commentators. Authority was not destabilized by questioning; rather it was mediated through it in an intellectual culture that tended to develop ideas collaboratively, and according to the shared logic of natural reason. In each of these cases questioning is not used as a way to end a relationship and reject authority outright. Rather it is a way to deepen understanding, sustain relationships and expand the Hindu tradition in new directions.

Bearing in mind both the complex and continuous aspects of the culture, this book will explore major Hindu traditions and key research questions. The challenges of the field are forcing scholars to better understand the diversity and dynamism, structures and tensions, and the contrapuntal coherence of ideal and actual religious life, that are present in all traditions. Hinduism merits study for its cultural contribution and the sheer number of people to whom it pertains. But in light of the above, it also has a very special value for scholarship in the Humanities and Social Sciences.

Notes

1. The Lokāyata or 'materialist' school of thought was an exception, in that it was said to have held that life ends with the death of the present body.
2. T. S. Rukmani claims a special significance for yoga above the other darśanas for, perhaps even more widely than the linguistic and logical technologies of Mīmāṃsā and Nyāya respectively, Yoga was appropriated as a methodology for diverse sects and soteriologies.

2 Key Themes: Chapters and Reading Paths

Chapter Outline

Study of Hinduism: Methods, Disciplines, History

The study of Hinduism has developed in parallel with the growth of modern academic research itself, as Hindus reflected on their own texts, beliefs, and practices and other cultures began to pursue increasingly detailed and objective understandings. Modern scholars seeking to give an accurate picture of Hinduism – through philology and translations, historical and archaeological research, fieldwork and analysis – must deal not only with the raw data, but also with debates over the interpretation and representation of cultures. This means that a wide range of contemporary research techniques are necessary for a good understanding of Hindu culture. Manuscriptologists must classify their texts correctly, making judgements about authenticity, while translators must reflect

the contextual nature of the meanings that they convey. Historians are often selective in their attention to texts and traditions, speculating about unknown causes and motivations, while deciding which strands should be taken as central and which as marginal. Scholars must assess potential bias in their sources and in themselves, and learn to counterbalance it with innovative research into under-represented perspectives. Students may unexpectedly find themselves participating in long-standing debates that touch on the colonial past, as well as on broader arguments concerning the nature of religion itself.

The History of Hindu Studies (Chapter 3) provides a guide to the major historical developments which have formed Hindu Studies as a field of research, and **Research Methods** (Chapter 4) summarizes approaches taken in the disciplines of philology, textual study, history, anthropology, archaeology, art history, comparative philosophy and comparative theology.

Vedic Hinduism: Vedas, Ritual, Sanskritic Culture, Vedānta

In the earliest period, the Indian subcontinent was filled with localized tribal groups, many of whom were mobile and are likely to have migrated in and out of the subcontinent both to the west – towards the Ancient Near East, Africa, Central Asia and the eastern Mediterranean, and to the east – towards South-East Asia. In the North Eastern reaches a settled urban civilization developed, reaching throughout the Indus River valley and up through the Punjab towards the Himalayas, as well as down into modern Gujarat towards the pre-Dravidian culture of the south. This 'Indus Civilization' would become centred on key cities such as Harappa, Mohenjo-Daro and outposts further afield. It provided a sophisticated culture that benefited from centralized urban planning (bricks are of standard sizes, drains and water supplies span the sites, shared public spaces such as halls and water-tanks seem to be in evidence), in addition to extensive trade networks and writing, in a script which famously remains largely undeciphered today. Little is known about the religions of the early tribes or the Indus cities; objects have been found which may be altars, aniconic deity or ancestor stones (some of which resemble the modern-day '*liṅgam*' form in which Śiva is worshipped), possible goddess figurines, and at least one clay seal with an image of a cross-legged, horned figure surrounded by animals, who may be a shaman, priest, nature-deity, an early form of Śiva Pāśupati or an ascetic.

In the middle of the second millennium BCE the situation changed as the Indus civilization declined, largely due to the drying of the Indus River. Shortly afterwards a new, literate society began to emerge along the Gangetic plain. The origin of these peoples who referred to themselves as Aryans, is not clear; they may have been descendents of the Indus population, drawing on new religious ideas and a new language to form a fresh ideology, or they may be migrants

from the Ancient Near East or Central Asia, bringing another family of cultural traits into the subcontinent to eventually mix with indigenous traditions. What is clear is that their culture was part of a broader continuum via trade and migration; 'Aryan' religion shared a number of common traits with the religions on the Arabian peninsula and the eastern Mediterranean, including a pantheon of gods propitiated through sacrifices on altars, and a common Indo-Aryan type of language through which these gods were described and their worship exhaustively prescribed. The Aryans' pantheon included a powerful boon-granting deity called Indra, who wielded a thunderbolt as his weapon; an all-seeing god of justice addressed as Mitra and/or Varuṇa; a fierce deity whose patience and protection had to be secured named Rudra; a fast-travelling messenger-god of fire called Agni; and a number of nature-goddesses such as Uṣas, goddess of the dawn. Some deities were worshipped in order to gain the typical gifts of health, wealth, sons and immortality in the god's heavenly world, while others, such as Savitṛ, were revered primarily for their splendid and luminous character.

The Vedic texts, in which hymns to these gods were recorded, went on to give details of the many different kinds of ritual (*yajña*) that should be done. They also described a division of society into *varṇas*, ascending hierarchical classes of *śūdras,* or labourers; *vaiṣyas,* or merchants; *kṣatriyas,* or rulers; and brahmins or priests and *brahmins* or priests. The ritual established a powerful social relation between the *kṣatriyas* who commissioned the sacrifices, and the brahmins who performed them, mediating divine aid and order to the human world in return for payment. Such rituals required a particularly high degree of detailed and precise action. Any inaccuracy in the time of day or year, geometrical shape of the altar or spatial arrangement of the sacrificial persons and tools, and pronunciation of the ritual invocations or combination of sacrificial substances and participants, could invalidate the whole sacrifice. As a result the instructions and invocations were carefully preserved through detailed oral traditions such as that still seen today among the Nambudiri brahmins of Kerala. These eventually inspired both the Devanāgarī script in which Sanskrit and many vernacular languages are written, and the growth of grammatical, exegetical, geometrical, astronomical and other sciences aimed at ensuring the correct enactment of the elaborate sacrifices.

Over the centuries of transmission of sacrificial lore, some brahmins attempted exegetical explanations of the ritual which began to probe deeper for its meanings and motivations, drawing on the etymology of specific words and names, on current myths and stories, and eventually also on contemporary philosophical reflection and current debates about the soul and its fate after death. These texts came to develop a new framework of belief, postulating that the human person contains an eternal soul (*ātman*) which shares some form of connection or identity with the ultimate nature of reality (*brahman*). Through meditative practice (*yoga*), the soul could escape both the body and the cycle of reincarnation (*saṃsāra*) that forces it to return to the phenomenal world (*māyā*). The soul

was thought to be able to unite with *brahman* in a state of liberation known as *mokṣa*, or in more theistic perspectives it was believed that through the deity's grace the soul could attain to permanent existence in heaven. These doctrines were debated by brahmin teachers, esoteric ascetic sects and among the intelligentsia of the kingdoms that were flourishing in the middle of the first millennium BCE, finally being collected in the latest section of the Vedas – 'Vedānta' (literally the 'end of the Veda') also known as the Upaniṣads. Subsequent texts such as the *Brāhma Sūtra* sought to unite the diverse perspectives of the Upaniṣads in a single consistent philosophy, while later texts such as the *Bhagavad Gītā* and many of the Purāṇas sought to synthesize Vedāntic philosophy with other popular perspectives, such as Sāṃkhya and Yoga, Vedic ritual and devotional monotheism and ascetic and domestic lifestyles. Throughout the medieval period key theologians such as Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, Mādhva and Vallabha all continued to read the Upaniṣads as a foundational text. In the modern period the two ritual and reflective dimensions of the early and late Vedic texts came into conflict, with the Ārya Samāj movement advocating a return to the earlier ethos of ritual, and the Brahmo Samāj movement championing the universal concept of *brahman* as the key ingredient of Hinduism.

Vedic culture became a vibrant and powerful force in the northern half of the Indian subcontinent, preserving and propagating its ideas through Sanskritic texts of many kinds. While relatively few Hindus have read the Vedas or are even aware of their contents, Vedic culture is associated with the ancient roots of Hindu tradition, and the auspicious cosmic order at which rituals were aimed. The texts are used in rituals which affirm order, such as births, weddings, funerals or rituals of government, while, in many respects, it is the *itihāsa* narratives of the epics and Purāṇas or the emotive poems of the bhakti saints that are most influential on the religious life of the majority.

Vedic cosmology and ritual are discussed in Angelika Malinar's chapter on **'Hindu Cosmologies'**, (Chapter 4). The influence of Sanskrit texts is discussed under **'Text, Translation and Interpretation'** in Chapter 5, **Research Methods** and Approaches, and in the discussion of **'Tradition, Authority and Dissent'** in Chapter 7, **Future Directions**.

Ascetic Traditions: Renouncers, Sādhus, Yogis

Alongside Vedic Hinduism with its emphasis on sacrifices and social order, a parallel culture of mental and physical disciplines was also thriving beyond the city boundaries. Among these esoteric schools of ascetics, gnostic aims to liberate the soul from the body were combined with shamanic goals of cultivating supernatural powers and forming relationships of possession or identity with deities. These religious trends grew in the middle of the first millennium BCE to

produce distinct ascetic traditions in which, rather than brahmins learning the science of ritual from a teacher, initiated *sādhus* received direct, and sometimes secret training from a *guru*. Yogic and Tantric ideologies informed these esoteric traditions, which flourished within Buddhism, Jainism and Hindu religious cultures until they formed a vigorous section of society. Ascetic traditions continue to the present day, often associated with Śiva who is himself the 'ascetic god' – his iconography routinely picturing him meditating in the Himalayas wearing the top-knot and animal skins of a *sadhu*. But they are also found in Śākta traditions, and they pervade Vaiṣṇava bhakti notions of intense devotional focus on the divine as one's inner self: the *Bhagavad Gītā* suggests an ascetic lifestyle for those devoted to Kṛṣṇa. The *gopīs,* the milkmaids of Kṛṣṇa's village who are in love with him, are described as having the self-disciplined inner focus of *yogis* in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. In society at large, the ascetic renunciation of social ties and domestic lifestyle were incorporated into the *āśrama-dharma* system prescribing both domestic and ascetic stages of life for all higher castes, and it remains a model for widows, celibate students and others who stand outside of the domestic ideal of the family. Jain monks and nuns continue to exemplify ascetic ideals in a structured way within society, and pilgrimages are often a context in which popular society at large is able to observe and interact with 'ascetic' society. The ideal of the ascetic is a key motif that pervades Hindu cultures.

Current approaches to Hindu ascetic cultures are surveyed in Chapter 4 in Sondra Hausner's section **'Ascetic Traditions'**, and further material is found in Dominic Goodall and Harunaga Isaacson's section **'Tantric Traditions'**. Some of the key ideologies underlying these traditions are discussed in greater detail by Knut Axel Jacobsen in his **'Sāṃkhya and Yoga'**. Information on the martial nāgās of Rajasthan and the sādhus of the Himalayas and Allahabad can be found in Chapter 7 in the section on **'Regional Perspectives';** on female ascetics in the section on **'Women and Gender'** and the section **'Spiritual Techniques'** in the Introduction.

Hindu Literatures: Mahābhārata, Rāmāyaṇa, Epics, Poetry

The literary traditions of India form a vast resource for scholars, and were for decades almost the sole basis of the study of Hinduism. Key genres such as the Vedas, the Sūtras which summarize the teachings of different schools and the Bhāṣyas which give commentaries on them, Śāstra manuals on various social and natural sciences, epics, Purāṇa collections of myth and doctrine, Tantra and Āgama esoteric revelatory texts and Gītās or devotional poems, together constitute the literary core of Hindu culture. They often blend religious with non-religious topics, and link different regions through their shared oral composition

by bards, or dramatization in songs, plays, village puppet-shows, and today in films and television. The two most popular works of epic literature are widely considered to be the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Composed between the fourth centuries BCE and CE, as Hindu empires were recovering ground from Buddhist, Jain and Hindu ascetic traditions, the *Mahābhārata* is a defence of worldly duty in the face of prevailing trends towards single-minded pursuit of liberation. The *Mahābhārata* is a vast text that narrates many stories but is centred on the struggle for succession of two sets of cousins, the five virtuous Pāṇḍava brothers, legitimate heirs to the kingdom who are aided by Kṛṣṇa, an incarnation of Viṣṇu, and their enemies, the devious and aggressive Kauravas, who force their cousins first into exile, and then into a vast battle. Along the way, the noble king Yudhiṣṭhira, the good warrior Arjuna, their virtuous wife Draupadī and innumerable other characters strive to follow their correct duty or *dharma*, contributing in sometimes unexpected ways to the welfare of all. The *Mahābhārata* contains a number of theological discourses placed in the mouths of the protagonists, in which the soul, reality and liberation are discussed, usually in language that is distinctly Vedāntic. The *Bhagavad Gītā*, Kṛṣṇa's response to Arjuna's doubts on the threshold of war, is the most famous of these.

The *Rāmāyaṇa* tells of Viṣṇu's incarnation as the righteous King Rāma and his struggle to maintain his kingdom and win back his wife Sītā from the demonic King Rāvaṇa of Sri Lanka. This is achieved with the help of Rāma's brother Lakṣmaṇa, and his devoted servant Hanumān, who is part monkey and part divine son of the god Vāyu. Rāma victoriously recovers his wife and establishes righteous rule over his kingdom, although his victory is marred by subsequent and ultimately tragic doubts about whether Sītā's virtue has remained intact. These stories span Hindu cultures, reaching beyond India to find new forms in the popular culture of South-East Asia and beyond. In many cases, different regions have made their own modifications in the narratives, or in other cases, they have formed a template for local epics with altered heroes and storylines. To these two stories can be added the *Harivaṃśa* as a third core Vaiṣṇava epic that is also popular and forms a bridge to the style and content of the Purāṇas. It adds a cosmological framework to these tales, describing the creation of the universe and the origins of the royal solar and lunar dynasties, and tells of Kṛṣṇa's earlier life as an irresistibly beautiful cowherd youth in the rural setting of Braj.

These three major Vaiṣṇava epics are discussed in detail by Simon Brodbeck in **'The Sanskrit Epics'** (Chapter 4). Other literatures also exist however, both as folk-stories circulating in the culture (which may be told at festivals), as oral epics which are sung in set verse form by trained bards, and as complex Sanskrit prose texts such as the Purāṇas, or vernacular poetic 'songs' which are integrated into devotional expression and ritual. Devotional literatures are also discussed in the section **'Bhakti Traditions'** by Karen Pechilis (Chapter 4). Techniques for studying oral literatures are outlined in 'Textual Traditions' in

Chapter 1 and the place of female characters in epic and poetic literature is explored in the section on **'Women and Gender'** in Chapter 7.

Bhakti Traditions: Worship of Śiva, Viṣṇu, the Goddess and Other Deities

As the Vedic deities gave way to a fresh pantheon of gods described in the epics and later the Purāṇas, a new form of worship accompanied the transition. Vedic deities such as Indra and Agni existed side-by-side with the 'new' pantheon which included Śiva, an ascetic deity of energy and liberation; Viṣṇu, a deity associated with loving grace, social justice and – in his form as Kṛṣṇa – worldly beauty; and the goddess in her many forms, who can be both a warrior and nurturer. Gradually such gods, popularized in myth and literature, and worshipped in increasingly elaborate temples, became the predominant deities in most Hindu cultures. They were distinguished by their highly personalized characters, which coincided with a newly personal engagement between worshipper and deity, referred to in the *Bhagavad Gītā* as *bhakti*: a personal 'participation' in or enjoyment of the deity. From propitiation as the main form of approach to Vedic and also village deities, *bhakti* worshippers sought a greater intimacy with the divine. This could mean realizing that the deity is already one's true identity; becoming the deity through transformative rituals; or cultivating a powerful personal relationship modelled on human relationships with a lover, spouse, child, friend, parent, beloved sovereign, guru or liberator. These personal relations were often (but not always) thought to establish an egalitarian access to liberation that transcends barriers of caste or gender.

Such human–divine relationships came to be expressed and encouraged by the emotive poetry of ecstatic figures who acquired a following and became the inspirational 'poet–saints' of the bhakti traditions. In the Vedānta-influenced Vaiṣṇava sects, or sampradāyas, Śrīvaiṣṇavas were affiliated with the philosophy of Rāmānuja and devoted to Viṣṇu's consort Lakṣmī; the Puṣṭimārg followed the philosophy of Vallabha; and the Caitanya Vaiṣṇavas revered the ecstatic Bengali saint Caitanya and adopted his reverence for Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā. Śaiva traditions include the dualistic Śaiva Siddhānta with its 'pure' Vedic style of worshipping Śiva and its aspiration to attain to his heaven by virtue of his grace, and, at the other end of the Śaiva spectrum, the Krama tradition of Tantric worship of Śiva as an impure cremation-ground ascetic, using impure substances as powerful tools in the search for divinization or liberation. Śākta traditions include the village worship of local goddesses of disease and fertility, the Purāṇic worship of Durgā as a protectress, the animal sacrifices offered to Kālī at the famous Kalighat temple near Kolkata and the ritual marriage of the goddess Sri Mīnākṣī to her consort at her temple in Tamil Nadu. Bhakti styles of

religion also appealed in non-personalistic traditions, influencing the northern Sants and their worship of an abstract transcendent divinity. It extended beyond Hinduism, blending with Persian Sufi traditions of poetic devotion and helping to inspire the Mahāyāna Buddhist development of its own pantheon of deities. The lives of the major saints were narrated in hagiographic traditions, disseminated through stories, poetry and iconographic arts, and institutionalized through temples and pilgrimages, becoming a major feature of popular Hindu worship to the present day. Some scholars highlight the rhetoric that has developed around the emergence of bhakti styles of religion, noting the way it has been portrayed as a distinctively 'Hindu' movement that arose as an indigenous response to Buddhist and subsequently Muslim influence. The importance of Purāṇic texts as mediators of bhakti stories, theology, practices, and pilgrimages suggests that the bhakti trend was a natural development of Vedic theism and Vedāntic philosophy, but it is important to note that Tantric, yogic, tribal, Islamic and other influences have also added key elements to this now-pervasive style of Hindu culture.

'Bhakti Traditions' by Karen Pechilis explores this dimension of Hinduism, considering its importance and the academic debates that have grown around it. **'Sanskrit Epics'** by Simon Brodbeck looks at the place of the major epics in the Vaiṣṇava traditions; bhakti worship and imagery are explored in **'Hindu Iconology and Worship'** (Chapter 4); the worship of the goddess in the section on **'Women and Gender'** under Future Directions; theistic theological ideas in the section on **'Hindu Philosophical Traditions'**; attitudes to divinity and embodiment in the introduction; and specific traditions of bhakti worship in the section on **'Regional Perspectives'**.

Tantric Traditions: Texts, Rituals, Disciplines and Deities

Tantric Hinduism comprises a major group of traditions developing as part of a South-East Asian trend that added essential elements to mainstream Hinduism, as well as to the more esoteric practices. In its origins, Tantra possibly drew upon tribal traditions of localized nature-oriented animism and fertility cults, and shamanistic trends of possession (*āveśa*) and the cultivation of powers (*siddhis*). But with the rise of monarchic states and urban culture, Tantra and its antinomian practitioners were appropriated by royal courts to legitimate their power. Its ritual style, drawing on symbols of power, became integrated into temple ritual. Tantric traditions are characterized by (a) a high degree of ritual, often aimed at 'sacralization' or 'divinization' of the physical body, location or offering; (b) highly disciplined esoteric practices, passed down through initiatory lineages, which involve the cultivation of powers through yoga, possession or the use of 'impure substances' usually related to the body, for example,

blood, sexual fluids, ash; (c) a tendency to see divinity as polarized into masculine and feminine aspects that are energized through interaction and union, and that can be manifested by actual men and women. More closely associated with Śaiva and Śākta traditions than with Viṣṇu, Tantra can nevertheless be seen as a 'style' of religion (rather than a particular set of beliefs or affiliations), and as such it has also been influential on Vaiṣṇava traditions such as Pāñcarātra, Gauḍiya Vaiṣṇavism and Srivaiṣṇavism, as well as on Buddhist and even Muslim (e.g. Baul) traditions.

The chapter on current approaches to **'Tantric Traditions'** by Dominic Goodall and Harunaga Isaacson reviews the work that has been, and still needs to be, done in the field. The importance of Tantric traditions is also reflected in Chapter 6, **'Regional Perspectives'**, which highlights specific contexts in which it has combined with bhakti worship, ascetic disciplines and Vedic ritual to affect major traditions in almost every region; many modern Indian and diaspora communities would be surprised to find that their habitual temple *pūjā* owes more to Tantric than to Vedic ritual templates.

Philosophical Traditions: Mīmāṃsā, Vedānta, Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Cārvāka

Hindu philosophical traditions may be said to have their earliest origins in the speculations of the Vedas on topics such as cosmology and ultimate reality, ritual symbolism and efficacy, the nature of language and the nature of death and the soul. From the 'sciences' that emerged to apply these reflections to the correct enactment of the ritual, the Pūrva Mīmāṃsā school evolved as a science of grammar and meaning. This was followed by the development of the Uttara Mīmāṃsā, a school which aimed to understand the persons (particularly ātman, the soul, and *brahman*, the divine ground of reality), relations of equivalence or causal efficacy, and goals (*mokṣa*, or liberation from reincarnation) that motivated the ritual. Other perspectives on reality, or *darśanas*, and attendant methods for realizing them also developed, and the major 'orthodox' philosophical schools can be grouped into three pairs of schools, each with a metaphysics and a methodology. Thus Uttara Mīmāṃsā, or 'Vedānta', addresses the nature of ultimate reality as *brahman*, and the self as ātman, which was seen as being linked to brahman by a relation of either identity, dependency or great intimacy, depending on whether one is non-dual (*advaita*), qualified (*viśiṣṭādvaita*) or dual (*dvaita*) Vedāntin. Pūrva Mīmāṃsā is mainly concerned with linguistic philosophies that facilitate the analysis of language using the words and grammar through which they are expressed. Sāṃkhya has a long history as a 'gnostic' style of folk metaphysics which posits two dimensions of reality: *puruṣa*, pure consciousness which is devoid of qualities and specific thoughts, and

prakṛti, phenomenal reality which includes both material things and also mind, perception and identity. Humans are seen as being made of both elements, and Yoga is the method which was adopted to liberate the *puruṣa* from the influence of *prakṛti*. The Vaiśeṣika school of atomistic thought viewed reality as composed of plural monadic parts and described the kinds of atom through a system of categories that was linked to Nyāya, the Indian school of logic, which over time became pervasively influential on all of the other schools of thought.

While these six schools are often referred to as the 'sad-darśanas', the six orthodox Hindu philosophical perspectives, many other groups were seen as crucial to philosophical debate in different periods. In a fourteenth-century survey of contemporary philosophical schools, the Advaitic Vedāntin philosopher Mādhava lists Cārvākas (materialists), Buddhists, Jains, Rāmānuja's qualified non-dual Vedāntic Vaiṣṇavism, dualistic 'Pāśupata' Śaivism, Tantric alchemical 'Rasesvara' Śaivism and Kashmiri advaitic 'Pratyabhijñâ' Śaivism, Vaiśeṣika atomism, Nyāya logic, the Mīmāṃsā linguistic philosophies of both Jaimini and Pāṇini and the Advaita Vedānta of Śaṅkara as significant contemporary schools. Two hundred years later a slightly different list would have been appropriate as qualified-advaita Vaiṣṇava Vedānta schools proliferated with nuanced differences; Indian philosophical culture was vibrantly active for two millennia from the fourth century BCE, and the range of perspectives have continuously shifted accordingly.

The typical commentarial method of hermeneutically interpreting source texts (often in novel ways), the teacher–pupil or guru–disciple structure of education, and the methods of analysis and argumentation in these traditions, connected all of the philosophical schools into a continuous culture that recognized shared questions, engaged in competitive debates and reciprocally drew upon each others' ideas in a creative, if implicit, way. The 'first wave' of classical Hindu *darśanas* was succeeded by a second medieval wave of philosophy that included Śaṅkara, Abhinavagupta, Rāmānuja, Vallabha and Mādhva, and some would add to this a third colonial wave represented by nineteenth- and twentieth-century thinkers such as Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo. These latter-day Hindu 'philosophers' tended to be less rigorous in their philosophical methodology than the classical and medieval traditions, but they were more creatively literary in their expression, and more individualistic in embracing independent theological reflection.

Approaches to the philosophical traditions are explored in depth by David Lawrence in **'Hindu Philosophical Traditions'**, and **'Sāṃkhya and Yoga'** are examined in greater detail in the chapter by Knut Axel Jacobsen. The philosophical study and continuation of those traditions is explored in the section on **'Philosophical and Theological Approaches'** to the study of Hinduism in Chapter 5.

Hindu Society: Village, Customs, Caste, Gender, Dharma

Developing out of a largely tribal subcontinental population, Hindu social ideologies aimed at constructing a coherent society'. As local tribes expanded into clans (*kulas*) comprising broadly related kinship groups, and these in turn grew more established in their landholdings and allegiance to chieftains who were advised by oracular bards or sacrificing priests, the family- or village-deities were elevated into clan-deities (*kula-devatā*), and gradually into cults devoted to local gods. With the development of these chieftains into dynastic monarchs ruling over centralized states from urban centres, the legitimation of kingship – aimed at ideological as well as actual control of now-distant borders – became a greater concern. Imperial dynasties promoted languages and deities which spanned vast territories, assimilating regional traditions into ever-more multifaceted stories of the gods. Customary pilgrimage itineraries cast a wide net throughout the regions. Trade, imperial expansion and the wandering communities of India's monks and sādhus encouraged the spread of ideas between different areas, gradually creating a continuous population which drew on a common pool of ideas, practices and social structures, while retaining localized clan or 'caste' identities.

Broad, universal principles for the structure of society and the behaviour of its individuals were outlined in genres of Sanskrit literature that used Vedic ideas as their foundation. From the Vedic notion of *ṛta*, cosmic order or structure, the concept of *dharma* developed, expressing the idea of a right order of all things, which humans must strive to follow. A world that follows *dharma* is an ordered world that functions in an effective and auspicious way. The *Dharma Sūtras* are early texts that summarized the key regulations for a life lived in accordance with *dharma,* offering a fundamentally particularistic approach to society; the recommended laws and lifestyles are specific to particular classes, professions, stages of life and genders. These recommendations were further developed in the Dharma Śāstras, more explicit and detailed manuals which became authoritative in many periods and regions. The most famous, the *Mānava Dharma Śāstra*, or 'Laws of Manu', has formed a key text not only for many Hindu communities but also for early Western interest in Hinduism. It is from such texts that the notion of Hindu society as divided into endogamous classes (*varṇas*) and stages of life (*āśramas*) has become widely known.

'Caste' is a word coined by the Portuguese to describe the many hierarchical social strata that traders and missionaries observed in the Indian society that they encountered when first arriving on the west coast. It corresponds mostly closely to the jāti*s*, or familial birth-groups, that are as strongly in evidence now as then, with individuals expected to marry within their *jāti* and sometimes to follow its characteristic profession and customs. *Jatis* are arranged along a broadly hierarchical system reinforced through the rules of ritual purity and

pollution. Different *jātis* have higher or lower levels of purity based both on their birth status and their lifestyle. As purity can be polluted through contact with others, public interaction is traditionally moderated according to the hierarchical ordering of these groups. The broader ideology through which these innumerable and locally varied *jāti* groups are inter-related across regions, is the Vedic idea that all Hindus are derived from one of four *varṇas* ('colours' or classes) which resulted from the sacrificial division of the primeval man. Brahmin priests were said to derive from the head and were the ritual officiants, *kṣatriya* rulers and warriors come from the arms and were the ritual patrons, *vaiṣya* merchants come from the legs, and *śūdra* farmers derive from the feet. Just as the feet are traditionally seen as impure in relation to the rest of the body, the *śūdras* were seen as the least-pure social group. This fourfold division has been retained as a reference point for classification of the complex levels that make up actual Hindu societies.

Individuals were also classed according to the four-fold system of *āśramas*, age-based divisions of the lives of higher-caste males. These comprised an educational stage in which one lives as a pupil (*brahmācārya*), a domestic stage as a spouse and parent (*gṛhastha*), a reflective stage as a hermit (*vānaprastha*) who begins to practise gentle forms of austerities while living apart from society and an ascetic stage as a full renouncer (*saṃnyāsa*). The āśrama system does not apply to women in the main texts treating dharma; instead women have their own dharmic trajectory as good daughters, wives and mothers, supporting the husband and later the son in his rituals, livelihood and pursuit of liberation. Further life-stage rites (*saṃskāras*) organize the average Hindu life, marking birth, adulthood, education, marriage, renunciation for some and eventually death. These rituals are conducted according to a belief in auspicious and inauspicious times and places, and are also concretized by their relation with ritual purity and impurity; someone who has lost a close relative or just given birth is polluted by this event and must follow certain rules in order to minimize the pollution of others around him or her. Thus the social dimension of purity and pollution rules helps to enforce ritual observance. Hindus follow these various structures and rituals to a greater or lesser degree. However, it is important to recognize the distinction between the ideal and actual dimensions of Hindu society. Texts such as the *Mānava Dharma Śāstra* are prescriptive manuals composed with a particular portion of Indian society as their audience. In many parts of Hindu communities, different rules and structures have prevailed.

Approaches to this topic are surveyed in **'Hindu Society in Anthropological Perspective'** by Marie Lecomte-Tilouine (Chapter 4) *Caste*, *varṇa*, *jāti* and *kula* are discussed in further detail in the section on **'Village, Local and Tantric Hinduism'** in Future Directions**.** The political dimensions of the idea of a distinctively 'Hindu' form of society are also addressed **'Place, Pilgrimage, Politics and Diaspora'** and the place of women in Hindu Society is discussed in **'Women and Gender'** in the

same chapter. Chapter 6, **'Regional Perspectives'** describes the forces which shaped Hindu regional cultures, and the anthropological and sociological study of Hindu society is explored in Chapter 5, **'Research Methods'**.

Worship and Practice: Pūjā, Temples, Festival, Pilgrimage

Popular Hindu life has been structured according to traditions of sacrifice and worship, ritual, festival and pilgrimage that inscribe religious stories and values of sanctity and order into every part of life – from the home to the village, regional temple, and distant pilgrimage site and through each period of the year and stage of life. Places, times and actions, are all brought within the sacred narrative of the cosmos through ritual and practice.

Some of these practices mark the stages of life: *saṃskāras* are rituals that sanctify events, establishing the life of which they are a part as auspicious and well-ordered according to *dharma.* Described in dharmic texts such as the *Gṛhya Sūtras*, the most popular *saṃskāras* mark the naming of the new-born baby, its first meal of solid food, the youth's initiation into a life of Vedic study, the return home after life as a student, the marriage ceremony and the funeral rites. These rituals elevated life into an auspicious state that harmonized with the order of the cosmos – astronomical calculations are still considered important for establishing the optimum timing of such rituals. Vedic ideas and mantras are still important in many saṃskāra rituals – indeed, for many Hindus they are the main point of contact with the Vedic worldview and practice.

Other rituals attend worship in temples and at home. Temple worship, or *pūjā*, takes the form of a visit to the temple and offerings of fruit and flowers, flame and prayers to one or more deities. The offerings, once accepted by the gods in the course of the ritual, are considered as *prasāda* – substances touched and blessed by the deity, and will be distributed throughout the community as a way of simultaneously distributing divine grace. The worshipper may also receive a sign of blessing in the form of a yellow sandalwood, red turmeric or grey ash mark (*tilak*) on the forehead. Temple worship is focused on shrines within the temple in which images or *mūrtis* of the deities are installed, ritually consecrated so that they can become vehicles of the god, and subsequently treated as personal manifestations of the deity – being awakened in the mornings, bathed, clothed, fed, taken to the chamber of their consort in some cases (as at the Sri Mīnākṣī temple in Madurai) and put to sleep at night. *Darśan*, the practice of meeting the gaze of the consecrated image in order to see and be seen by the deity, is widely practised. A similar sequence of worship is followed at shrines in the home, and both forms of *pūjā* allow the devotee to live 'alongside' his or her chosen god, worshiping in an intimate way via the channels afforded by the divine presence. *Bhajans*, or hymn-singing, chanting and other practices emphasize the emotional

dimension of worship, reflecting the incorporation of bhakti practices into the regular patterns of Hindu religious life. In some traditions, specifically Vedic styles of rituals predominate. At sites such as the Kalighat temple, however, the 'pure' vegetarian form of worship is replaced with animal sacrifices that are considered particularly powerful by those who use them, and in some temples a compromise is achieved by offering red paste as 'substitute' blood.

Worship also goes beyond the regular fixed sites of the temple, shrine or home; pilgrimages are traditionally popular ways to deepen one's connection to particular deities by visiting sites at which they are said to have been, or to wash away pollution and sins, accumulating an auspicious status and preparing oneself for eventual liberation. Pilgrims to sites such as Braj may feel themselves to be particularly close to Kṛṣṇa, walking on the landscapes where he too walked, just as pilgrims to Mount Kailash may feel themselves to be at the home and in the presence of Śiva. Alternatively, a pilgrim to Varanasi or Allahabad may simply hope to become more pure, and thus a better candidate for higher rebirth or ultimate liberation. In pilgrimage the normal rules and restrictions of life may temporarily be suspended, just as worldly concerns fall away at the pilgrimage sites, many of which are seen as *tīrṭhas*, or crossing points into the realm of the sacred. Festivals similarly offer a time for celebrating particular deities, and for increasing one's own auspicious status, while escaping from many of the normal rules of life. The Holi festival, during which coloured water and powder are thrown onto friends and strangers throughout the streets, is a classic example of a 'carnivalesque festival' in which the public realm becomes a place where normal rules and relations temporarily break down to allow for chaotic and challenging behaviour. The Navarātri festival celebrates the mythological period when the goddess, in the form of Śiva's consort Pārvatī, gets to leave her marital home in the Himalayas to pay a brief visit to her parents, thus again gaining a reprieve from daily duties. Many festivals involve the telling of relevant stories at performances, plays, or dances, and rare public displays of the deity outside the sacred precincts of the temple or shrine, in a procession that passes through the streets surrounded by celebrating crowds.

While Frits Staal has suggested that Hindu rituals tend to lack explicit meanings and motives, most forms of Hindu worship depend on underlying ideologies of participation in the lives of the gods, of auspicious times and places and of ritual purity and pollution – an unseen quality of persons that is related to bodily products and can be passed on to people, objects and places. Both menstruation and having one's hair cut are polluting because both involve shedding some product of the body, and a menstruating woman or a barber may be seen as transferring that pollution to his or her environment. Thus there are rules which govern the interaction of such persons until they have 'purified' themselves through washing or rituals. This is a common ideology, not confined to Hinduism; Islamic and Shinto ablutions before prayer reflect similar beliefs.

Some aspects of Hindu worship are discussed in **'Hindu Iconology and Worship'** by Kenneth Valpey, and many of the cosmological beliefs underpinning the ritual worldview are discussed by Angelika Malinar's **'Hindu Cosmology'**. Pilgrimage is further discussed in the discussion of **'Place, Pilgrimage, Politics and Diaspora'** in Chapter 7.

Hinduism and Modernity: Colonialism, Politics, Diaspora

Incorporating elements of Vedic, village and Tantric practice, as well as a wide range of deities and beliefs from every stage of Indian religious history, the Hindu traditions flourished up to and throughout the rule of Islamic governments in the early modern period. But following the transferral of power from Muslim into British hands in the eighteenth century, Hinduism experienced conditions that had a unique, new effect on its development. Much of British colonial rule involved influences on Hindu culture that went beyond mere political engagement. Colonialists imposed European cultural standards that differed widely from Hindu values, but which were nevertheless presented as superior in sophistication and moral calibre. Hindus were driven either to adapt to the colonialists' ideas of divinity, intellectual culture and social custom, or to defend themselves against their critiques. Upper-class Hindus received a Western style of education that inspired both new ideas and also identity crises. These developments required that a clarifying response be formulated, and from the nineteenth century a number of Hindus took it upon themselves to provide just that, taking advantage of the new accessibility of printing presses, and of British styles of polemic and protest.

Drawing on an eclectic range of classical texts and also in some cases Western sources, a number of individuals began to articulate their own theories of what Hindu identity is, how Hindus should live, what they should believe and what should be the relationship between Hinduism and other cultures. Ram Mohan Roy (1772–1833) was a Bengal brahmin given a Muslim education in Arabic and Persian literatures, and a Christian theological education which led him to reject the polytheistic worship of multiple deities, instead promoting an Advaitic non-dual worship of *brahman*, as described in classical Indian texts such as the *Brāhma Sūtra*. Ramakrishna Paramahamsa (1839–1886), a Bengali ecstatic who worshipped Kālī and other deities through a combination of bhakti, brahminical and Tantric religious forms that is familiar from earlier ecstatic saints of the region, inspired a young man called Narendranath Datta (1863–1902) who was interested in Western as well as Vedāntic ideas, to attempt a new neo-Vedāntic formulation of Hinduism. After a traditional renunciatory life of meditation in which he became known as Swami Vivekananda, he made his way to the 1893 Parliament of World Religions in Chicago, where he represented Hinduism as a

philosophy that accepts diverse beliefs, is accessible to all and teaches that the divine exists in all people equally, forming the basis for mutual universal respect. Vivekananda's simplified portrait of India's indigenous religious traditions was extremely popular with global audiences. 'Hinduism' was thereafter welcomed as a distinctive and beneficial world religion. Subsequent figures carried on this tradition of novel personal interpretations of Hindu religion; Cambridge-educated thinker Aurobindo Ghose (1872–1950), combined Vedānta and Tantra with Hegelian pantheism, and M. K. Gandhi (1869–1948), following Vivekananda and reflecting his own London education, sought to affirm all religions within the framework of Hindu ideals of renunciation and communal social welfare.

Many of these individuals sought not only to create a new philosophy, but also to put it into action through institutions and movements dedicated to transforming the religious and social culture that colonials had portrayed as 'backward'. The Ramakrishna Mission offers education and medical care in India, and Vivekananda's Vedānta Society, based in New York, promotes Hinduism on a global scale. Aurobindo's following led to the construction of a large experimental community in Pondicherry known as Auroville, and Gandhi started the 'Satyāgraha' movement dedicated both to spiritual truth and ethical action. Ram Mohan Roy's Brahmo Samāj was taken up by Debendranath Tagore (1817–1905) and Keshub Chandra Sen (1838–1884). But in reaction to its universalist perspective, Gujarati brahmin Dayananda Sarasvatī (1824–1883) started a 'back-to-basics' movement called the Ārya Samāj that promoted Vedic traditions focusing on ritual, while reflecting colonial tastes by rejecting image worship and endogamous caste. This trend for creating religious movements was developed in the increasingly polarized Indian society of the twentieth century into the creation of movements that favoured a more explicitly *political* kind of reform. In 1909 a member of the Ārya Samāj created the 'Hindu Maha Sabha', one of the first movements to define its Hindu identity ('Hindutva') in terms of opposition to Muslim and British power, and in 1925 a member of this movement created the Rastriya Svayam Sevak Sangh (RSS), an organization that is dedicated to actively promoting Hindu interests, and trains recruits in a military fashion for that purpose. In 1951, with India established as a self-governing democratic nation, the next step was for such groups to form a political party, and the Jana Sangh, which was later replaced by the Bharatiya Jana Party (BJP), was created. It defended Hindu values by banning the slaughter of cows, continued what may be seen as the 'Sanskritization' of Indian cultures by promoting Hindi as the official language of India, and was seen to endorse anti-Muslim sentiment through policies such as supporting the state of Israel. The relative liberalism that was embraced by the BJP once in power led a more extreme movement called the Shiv Sena to be formed in Maharashtra, drawing on memories of the Maharashtran king Śivaji to promote the idea of armed resistance to Islamic communities and cultures. The Shiv Sena contributed to the

argument over the fate of a mosque in Ayodhya that was claimed to have been constructed on a previous temple marking the birthplace of Rāma. The emotive debate, in which the mosque was portrayed as 'the last straw' for a Hindu population systematically denigrated in its own homeland, stirred the population to communal riots and killings in 1992. As a sort of Indian '9/11', the Ayodhya Mosque riots drew the world's attention to the Hindu approach to dealing with issues of identity and religious competition, and the study of political appropriations of Hinduism is now a major area.

While many reform movements have portrayed Hinduism as a religion that is deeply rooted to the land of India and its original inhabitants, Hindus have in fact become an international population through diasporic movements south and east into South-East Asia, and westward into East and South Africa, Europe, North America, the West Indies and elsewhere. Colonial empires were an important medium for this migration, and now the NRI, or 'non-resident Indian' is an important figure in the Indian media and economy. In many cases, international developments in Hindu identity, culture or practice have filtered back to India, while the West has provided fertile ground for the growth of new theological movements, often led by new charismatic 'saints' not unlike those around whom local religious life has been centred for much of Indian history. Transcendental Meditation, the International Society of Kṛṣṇa Consciousness, the Swaminarayan Mission, Jiddu Krishnamurti, the Radhasoamis, Brāhma Kumaris and the followers of 'gurus' such as Osho (Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh) have all added new international branches to the Hindu tradition as widely defined.

Approaches to **'Colonial Hinduism'** are discussed by Brian Hatcher in Chapter 4, as are some aspects of political Hinduism. The section on **'Place, Pilgrimage, Politics and Diaspora'** discusses both the relation between Hinduism and politics and the practice and study of Hinduism in the diaspora. Perspectives on the study of post- and pre-colonial Hinduism are suggested by Marie Lecomte-Tilouine in **'Hindu Society'**.

3 The History of Hindu Studies

Chapter Outline

Hindu Studies is a discipline with its own dramatic history, and this section charts the different forms that study of Hinduism has taken, putting into historical context past perspectives that remain influential on contemporary approaches. For these purposes, it defines Hindu Studies as the attempt to describe the religious culture of India, and to do so in a way that is backed up by some form of research.[1] It takes into account Indian indigenous approaches, the views of Greek, Chinese, Christian and Muslim outsiders, and the Western academic tradition in which this book stands. It can be argued that the history of Hindu Studies begins with early traditions of study and explanation by sects who sought to understand themselves and each other with greater clarity. Wilhelm Halbfass has argued that 'the study *of* India' should not be a unilateral activity with the westerner as subject and Indian as object. It is important to understand India's own self-constructed identity as a tradition alongside the West's construction of it (Halbfass, 1990, p. xi). Thus this section locates the modern academic approach within the broader framework of informed reflection on the Hindu traditions.

India's Indigenous Study of Hinduism

Key methods in the 'study' of Hindu traditions can be found within those traditions themselves. The creation, transmission and use of the Vedas depended

on a long-standing tradition of Vedic **scholarship**. Vedic texts have been memorized by brahmins over the last three millennia, providing detailed textual material that has supported interpretive discussions documented in the later sections of the Vedas. This close reading of the texts came to require a grammatical and hermeneutical methodology and the memorized acquisition of those texts as an internalized body of knowledge, supported by an attendant knowledge of ritual practices, astronomy, geometry and biological sciences.

These formal processes of study had become codified in the Vedic tradition of learning over many generations, and later authoritative scriptures, such as the texts of the Āḻvārs in the south and the *Mahābhārata*, which came to be seen as the 'fifth Veda', received a similarly detailed attention. Hindu modes of study have thus tended to be firmly rooted in close knowledge of texts and commentaries on them that provide a 'secondary literature'. Narratives of Vedic study found in the Upaniṣads suggest that young brahmins might be sent to a specialist '*ācārya*' to learn, and the relationship with that teacher was an important component of the personal, discursive approach to learning. Students would return at the end of a course of study with the expectation of having received a fixed body of knowledge and the skills to use it properly. Frits Staal has suggested that Vedic texts took the form of 'rules without meaning' for such students – mere instructions passed down by the tradition. But later Vedic texts sought deeper understanding of the reasons the rituals worked and what their symbolic referents were, suggesting that brahmin communities themselves engaged in contemporary debates over the need for study as a process of understanding. The Vedic model is still common in India, with students memorizing texts as a preliminary to exploring them in discussions with teachers.

The highly formalized methods of learning helped to inspire the formation of large teaching centres – effectively India's first universities. Taxila, Nālandā and Vikramaśīla are the most famous of these, the latter two surviving until the thirteenth century. Such universities taught not only the Vedic texts and the ritual that complemented them, but also the various theoretical disciplines that provided a foundation for these two pillars, the Vedāngas, or sciences (literally 'limbs' or 'supports'), of the Vedas. These included linguistics, reasoning (*hetu*, literally, 'causes'), medicine, law, astronomy and city-planning. Śāstras attempted to collect and represent distinct fields of knowledge, creating a cultural template of classic 'disciplines' such as law and ethics (*dharma-śāstra*), economics and governance (*artha-śāstra*), drama and aesthetics (nāṭya-śāstra), religious architecture (*vāstu-śāstra*) and of course grammar. In both the Sūtras and more explanatory Śāstras, diverse views were considered and assimilated to a single relatively coherent system, systematically explained. Not unlike the first Islamic universities that developed in North Africa and those that grew from them in Christian Europe, these universities saw a general understanding of the world as a necessary context for religious study and salvation.

With increasing urbanization in the middle of the first millennium BCE, the **royal courts** of local rulers became cosmopolitan centres for study in which brahmins could interact with a new intelligentsia who were not necessarily Vedic priests. The Upaniṣads describe a setting in which brahmins and nobles, both women and men, explored views about the universe in a critical way, using both texts and their own reasoning. Although such gatherings must have been restricted to a very limited portion of each community, the influence of this form of study seems to have been significant, and the courts of the governing classes remained important centres of scholarship into the Mughal period.

The rise of Buddhist and Jain scholars, and subsequent increased immigration beyond the areas that had been the Vedic heartland of northern India, led to a new situation in which non-Hindu scholars in South Asian societies studied, represented and critiqued Hindu ideas. This led to the development of methods of **scholarly debate** (*tarka*, or reasoned disputation) and genres of exposition aimed at presenting and defending an ideological position in the face of other competing views. With the development of accepted methods of debate, *vadavidyā* (science of debate) manuals were written teaching pupils the tricks of the trade. The *Nyāya Sūtra* of Akṣapāda (ca. 150 CE) gives a detailed and systematic exposition of the debating processes of the time. It lists the different kinds of debate, from honest truth-seeking discussions (*vada*) to tricky, dishonest debates aimed only at securing a victory (*jalpa*), to destructively critical debates where the true goal is to discredit the opponent (*vitaṇḍa*). This honest and remarkably self-reflective typology shows how far the art of debating had developed by this stage. Other sections explained how to draw on different kinds of reasons and valid forms of evidence (*pramāṇa*), to spot and use loopholes, avoid pitfalls and successfully conduct a debate towards the establishment or refutation of a thesis. The level of formalization of such debates was high, with time limits placed on the period for responding to critiques, and replies subject to careful screening for tricks such as the conflation of two different things or the use of metaphors to confuse an issue (Matilal, 1999).

A Buddhist text paints a picture of an intellectual culture in which scholars took part in court debates with a weary eye towards the heightened political significance that they entailed. Requested by King Menander to dispute with him, Nagasena asks whether it would be a scholarly or a kingly debate:

> When scholars debate, your majesty, there is summing up and unravelling of a theory, convincing and conceding, there is also defeat, and yet the scholars do not get angry at all.
>
> When the Kings debate, your majesty, they state their thesis, and if anyone differs from them, they order him punished, saying 'Inflict punishment upon him!' (Trans. from Trenckner, 1962; cited in Matilal, 1999, p. 33)

The Sūtras were composed by schools that felt it necessary to record their views for future preservation, and also to represent themselves to others. Apologetic texts belonging to Buddhist and Vedāntic schools yield considerable information about the views of their opponents, demonstrating an intellectual tradition in which thinkers carefully studied the texts of their opponents. The *Sarva Darśana Saṃgraha*, a medieval compendium of the philosophical schools that were known to its author, Mādhava, even gives evidence of a text-based phenomenological methodology: he was familiar with and cited at least part of the texts held by each school to be representative, and explained them according to what he thought to be their own arguments without giving a personal judgement on the views of the opponent.

Exegetical study and commentary were the main means through which thinkers could contribute to the received texts and ideas of their traditions. While the Tantric and bhakti traditions allowed for a degree of textual novelty derived from divine inspiration, most literature developed in a way that was wholly determined by the pedagogic practices to which the authors were subject. In some cases this meant merely expanding on an existing text in a way that made it clearer, but in others it meant making decisions which came down on the side of one or another possible interpretation. Thus commentators had to be discerning theologians, and some soon learned ways in which to use authoritative texts as the basis for original ideas. Early texts such as the Upaniṣads, Dharma Śāstras and Sanskrit epics alluded to their Vedic sources in informal ways, as and when required, to establish the authority of their statements as ultimately based in revelation. Typical styles of explanation, often accounting for a word, ideal or ritual through accounts of how certain word combinations could have been derived, allowed for considerable leeway as new generations sought new meanings by postulating new origins.

The writing of Sūtras and the development of a more meticulous commentarial tradition were essential to the growth of continuous and coherent schools of thought. Authors became connected in a textual conversation that spanned multiple generations and historical contexts. Many darśanas – 'perspectives' or schools – replaced Vedic sources with Sūtras, aphorisms, tersely written as a mnemonic device for remembering key teachings. Their meaning could be highly ambiguous if one did not know the teaching to which an abbreviated sentence referred, thus encouraging the growth of a more formal exegetic science. A commentarial work, or *bhāṣya*, could contain specific *vrtti* comments that focused on particular lines, and further *varttikas* that explained the basis of those particular interpretations. As a result the hermeneutic process allowed considerable room for fresh interpretations, but such interpretations were required to show a sincere and knowledgeable engagement with the original text.

This is seen in the accumulation of varying Vedāntic philosophies that proliferated in the medieval and early-modern periods, on the basis of speculative writings in the *Āraṇyakas* and *Upaniṣads*. Commentarial methodology tended to take its cue from the type of text being elucidated. Important philosophical thinking is done in the philosophical commentaries, and similarly, literary criticism is done in the commentaries on literary texts, drawing on the distinctive theories of art in the Indian aesthetic tradition. Thus, for instance, the literary theorist Anandavardhana interprets the *Mahābhārata* according to the *śānta-rasa* mode of art, seeing its less heroic scenes of despair, tragedy and futility as a literary strategy calculated to instil in the viewer a tranquil distance from the world of human action (Tubb in Sharma, 1991).

The Neo-Vedāntic schools in particular demonstrate a high degree of philosophical complexity that results from successive waves of commentary. Such theologians and philosophers wrote at the intersection of multiple pressures: the sixteenth-century Vedāntin Vallabha had, for instance, to demonstrably ground his ideas in the authoritative Vedāntic source texts of the Upaniṣads, *Brāhma Sūtra* and *Bhagavad Gītā*, squaring them with the Vaiṣṇava source text of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, and discreetly merging Vedāntic ideas with Sāṃkhya concepts, while simultaneously distinguishing his own synthesis from the doctrines of predecessors such as Rāmānuja, and also refuting his own theological enemies. Others such as Rūpa and Jiva Gosvāmi incorporated new discourses borrowed from aesthetics into their work, and still others borrowed from controversial sources such as Tantric texts, sometimes covering their tracks by altering and obscuring the original terminology, couching it in new terms. Commentaries were an important tool both for gaining access to the original text (which might be read at a remove of centuries), and for adding to or even subtly refuting its views while continuing to be identified as within the same tradition. The interpretations written by Śaṅkara and subsequently by Rāmānuja on the *Brāhma Sūtra,* develop clearly conflicting views on the basis of the same text to which both remain affiliated. Śaṅkara's interpretation of the *Bhagavad Gītā* was a prerequisite for establishing himself as a valid member of the Vedānta tradition, but his monistically oriented commentary on the more dualistic sections of this text display a range of creative hermeneutic tactics that were available to such thinkers. Commentary was thus the main medium of theological development, standing at the nexus of orthodoxy and creativity.

Indian traditions of learning tended, as in many other cultures, to be focused around a central **teacher** who mediated to the pupil a lineage of earlier teachings addressing key questions or views. While much learning in the Vedic tradition was undertaken within the family or clan, and the figure of the *guru* who guides one's training in a particular discipline was also important in the Tantric and yogic traditions, the idea of the *ācārya* as a generic teacher gradually developed

and is reflected in the stories of pupils and gods travelling to learn from a teacher, and returning home with new knowledge. Students were initiated to scholarly life through the *upanayana* ceremony, and left the family home to live with the teacher. As in ancient Greece, a popular teacher who attracted many students might end up with star pupils taking on the role of assistant teachers, effectively forming a school. In the Dharma Sūtras scholarly study is one lifestyle that a higher caste adult male may choose; by the time of the Dharma Śāstras the life of a student was suggested as preliminary to all other vocations, reflecting the way in which scholarship was increasingly seen as integral to all ethical practice.

In the area of religion, the tradition-delineated nature of education elided the distinction between confessional theology and study of Hinduism. There was nothing equating to the late Western notion of **scholarly objectivity** to guide any unbiased gathering, analysis and general representation of Hindu cultures. Nevertheless concerns for accurate representation are in evidence in texts such as the *Sarva Darśana Saṃgraha* of Mādhava, and in many cases the detailed familiarity required to refute a particular tenet in an opposing school led to more accurate knowledge and discussion of it among opponents, than among supporters of the school or subsequent generations of disinterested scholars. Reasons given for a position were regularly tested in debate, leaving little room for the kind of sophistry against which Plato warns.

Indian culture encountered Western methodology when British colonialists installed an 'English-style' system of higher education in the nineteenth century. Study of Hindu thought was taken up by a lettered 'middle-class' of Indians. The traditional methods of study continued, but these new self-styled scholars largely engaged with texts that had already been promoted by the colonial culture itself, and expressed themselves in ways that could be easily understood by Western readers. Their interpretations thus rose to international prominence. Their scholarship was individualistic and creative, producing a number of new brands of Hindu thought, including the universalism of the Brahmo Samāj and the traditionalism of the Ārya Samāj. They can be seen as important heirs of the scholarly tradition, using new methods to interpret texts according to a new context, although it is also true that their representations of Hinduism often assumed a broad overview of Hindu history that was ill-rooted in the facts, and often lacked a critical attention to textual or other first-hand material. Interestingly, a more traditional engagement with source texts is displayed by modern diasporic 'gurus'. Commentaries and/or translations of the *Bhagavad Gītā* were written by Swami Nikhilananda, Swami Prabhupada, Swami Chinmayananda and Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. By doing so, these 'teachers' explicitly located themselves within the Indian scholarly tradition, claiming a continuity with earlier *Bhagavad Gītā* commentators such as Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja and Madhusudana Sarasvatī. Others modern gurus have chosen texts that were more specifically

relevant to their own traditions, as in Swami Śivānanda's 1980 translation of the *Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, and Swami Lakṣmaṇajoo's translation of the eleventh-century Kashmir Śaiva theologian Abhinavagupta's commentary on the *Bhagavad Gītā*. Traditional scholarship is alive; improved training in the use of textual sources, and both classical and critical methods of study, will help to maintain its intellectual integrity.

Contemporary Indian academic institutions study Indian culture in flourishing history, language and archaeology departments, and many also incorporate Indian cultural material into disciplines such as philosophy, literature, art history, law and the history of science. Nevertheless academic attention to Hindu religious traditions remains limited in India, with the academic study of religion often seen as a *confessional* pursuit. John Stratton Hawley notes with irony that India is 'the nation that is in many ways the world's most religiously sophisticated country – and scarcely a single scholar at the university level identifies herself or himself by discipline as a student of religion' (Hawley, 2005, p. 319). Courses and even departments of Religious Studies, studying Hinduism alongside other religions, are gradually appearing.

Early Observers

The 'Study of Religion' in India according to the Western academy's criteria of research using primary materials, explanation, critical distance and objectivity, has predominantly taken the form of *outsider* observations of religious cultures. Such outsider views can offer a lucid perspective which records distinctive aspects of Hinduism without prioritizing a particular standpoint. However such views inevitably reflect the researchers' own points of access to the culture, which may also be limited. Outsiders' observations tend to stand within the comparative framework that is furnished by their own cultural background; this means that different observers have prioritized different features of Hinduism. Early modern Jesuit missionaries who tried to summarize Hindu beliefs may not even have realized that their local sources provided an excellent study of, for instance, specifically Keralan religion, rather than the general survey they had intended. Another example is Ibn Battuta, the medieval Moroccan jurist, who focused on polytheism and *satī* in his observations of Hindu culture simply because they were the features that seemed most different from his own Muslim beliefs. Every view must be contextualized in terms of the perspective and interests of the scholar. Providing the modern scholar acknowledges such biases, many early sources offer a highly illuminating picture of Hindu cultures at particular locations and periods in history.

External accounts of India existed within adjacent cultures, although these were often based on travellers' tales rather than on direct observation. The

Greeks interacted with Indians at home and abroad from an early period (see Sharma, 2003; Goyal, 1996), and the most famous of their accounts is by the fifth-century historian **Herodotus**, who sought to give considered narratives of civilizations other than his own, based on hear-say evidence from those who had visited them. He acknowledged that these stories might not be accurate and that his own concern was primarily for the interest of the stories rather than their validity. Thus his few tales of India are famed for their inclusion of details which are zoologically mystifying or biologically impossible. Believing that India was the easternmost inhabited territory from his homeland, his accounts largely refer to areas in north-west India, Pakistan and Afghanistan. From a historical perspective, his stories suggest that contemporary regions of India were a diverse tribal landscape; some of his sources give feasible accounts of tribes that are wholly vegetarian and wear garments made of the wool of trees (probably cotton). But the text cannot be considered a reliable source as it also recounts tales of tribes said to kill and eat their friends when they become ill, and to copulate like cows in public. Like the Victorian anthropology of J. G. Frazer, some of these early Greek accounts based on travellers' tales convey potential glimpses of practices observed (and possibly ill-understood) at the time. But their main value is in telling the scholar about the views, interests and exoticist trends already evident in Greek thought. India represents one example of the cultural 'other': odd and incomprehensible, peopling the landscape beyond 'home' with lifestyles that widen the scope of human possibilities into a chaotic range that resists over-arching understanding.

In 326 BCE Alexander the Great invaded India, providing a more stable bridge for visitors from Greece and Central Asia to enter and observe India and the cultures it then contained. One of the first records of a traveller systematically reflecting on Indian culture from personal experience and within the framework of a broader awareness of the need to understand global cultures in general, is by the fourth-century envoy **Megasthenes**. Megasthenes was born in Anatolia or modern Turkey, and having entered into the employment of Seleucus I of Syria, he travelled from the Arab peninsula to northern India as an ambassador to the court of Candragupta Maurya, known in the Greek world as Sandrocottus. Thus he had already seen a wide range of different landscapes and cultures by the time he arrived in India. In his resulting study, *Indica*, he gives some account of the Punjab and Rajasthan, the Gangetic plain, the Himalayas, Sri Lanka, and makes possible allusions to the area near the border of modern Afghanistan and Pakistan where he seems to have lived for some time. *Indica* only survives in fragments recorded by others, and it can be difficult to ascertain the precise Indian regions and groups that are designated by his Greek names. It is also not clear which places he saw first-hand. But this was an influential work subsequently used as a source by later historians such as Arrian, Strabo, Diodorus and Pliny. Megasthenes arrived in India at a time of intense

monarchical expansion and political tumult, and this is reflected in his emphasis on kings and kingdoms. In particular, he seems to have been concerned with finding characters who could be equated with those heroic figures the Greeks believed to have had an Asian origin: Heracles and Dionysus (see *Indica,* Fragment 46).

While Alexander's invasion brought observers from the West, the spread of Buddhism out of India also led to numerous visits from **East Asian** travellers and historians. By the seventh century this movement was so common that a visit to Indian Buddhist sites by sixty monks at one time from China, Korea and Central Asia was recorded (Sircar, 1977, p. 21). These Buddhist visitors focused less on political polities and more on religious concerns, making them somewhat disinterested in non-Buddhist features of the current societies of India. But their accounts show a culture in which Buddhist elements mixed with Hindu elements, and were in many cases shared and even indistinguishable. **Fa-Hien**, or Faxian, is recorded as visiting India and Sri Lanka between 399–414 CE. He travelled through important centres of religious activity and debate, such as Varanasi and is the source of some fascinating glimpses of fifth-century India. He records that another monk, Tao-Ching, on seeing the austerity of the *śramaṇas*, or ascetics, in India, vowed never to return to China, and he notes how widespread the culture of oral transmission was (with some regret, given his own search for authoritative and transportable Vinaya texts). He describes one territory in central northern India as a place in which capital punishment was discouraged and meat and alcohol shunned. He also documented the formalized division of society in his observation that castes who were considered polluting because they hunt and fish, had to strike a piece of wood in a leper-like warning to the 'clean' community when entering a village.

I-Tsing, or Yijing, another Chinese Buddhist visitor, gives interesting accounts of the debating culture of India:

> . . . to try the sharpness of their wit (lit. 'sharp point of the sword'), they proceed to the king's court to lay down before it the sharp weapon (of their abilities); there they present their schemes and show their (political) talent . . . When they are refuting heretic doctrines all their opponents become tongue-tied and acknowledge themselves undone. (I-Tsing in Takakusa (trans.), 1896)

Whereas Greek observers had seen themselves as travel-writers serving an audience seeking entertainment in Herodotus' case, and socio-political information in that of Megasthenes, Chinese observers were monks on a very specific mission to survey the conditions under which India had yielded the Buddhist religion, and under which it continued as its homeland. Often ambivalent about the relation between Hindu and Buddhist traditions, but

sympathetic to the overall Indian cultural framework of Buddhism, their observations offer a valuable insight into the practices of the day.

Islamic observers came closer to a style of consciously objective records grounded in concrete evidence, later championed by Western academic study. The twelfth-century Persian traveller Al-Shahrastani wrote a 'Book of Religious and Philosophical Sects' which has been hailed as the first systematic study of religions that explicitly aimed to be objective. However Al-Shahrastani's work was not based on first-hand observation, but rather on study and summary of existing accounts. **Al-Biruni**, an eleventh-century Muslim scholar born in what is today Uzbekistan, travelled to India in the early tenth century, and subsequently wrote the *Kitab-al-Hind,* a work which aimed at impartial and accurate description of the culture that he encountered during fourteen years spent living in India. As a scholar with diverse interests in the sciences as well as the study of history and culture, he brought an ideal of empirical objectivity to study of Indian culture that had not been applied in the same way by previous scholars. His is thus perhaps the first attempt at what we would now call a 'phenomenological' description of Indian religion as a whole. He made it clear that his own goal was to facilitate the kind of information that supports correct understanding and dialogue, and draws on the Qur'an as a call to the bracketing of bias required by scholarly objectivity:

> No one will deny that in questions of historical authenticity *hearsay* does not equal *eyewitness*, for in the latter the eye of the observer apprehends the substance of that which is observed, both in the time and in the place . . . the tradition regarding an event which does not in itself contradict either logical or physical laws will invariably depend for its character as true or false upon the character of the reporters, who are influenced by the divergency of interests and all kinds of animosities and antipathies between the various nations . . . It has been said in the Koran, 'speak the truth, even if it were against yourselves' (Sura 4.134). (Al-Biruni in Sachau, 1887, pp. 3–4)

Al-Biruni studied Indian culture with understanding as his primary goal, rather than focusing primarily on military or political history or other more pragmatic concerns. Above all, he based his accounts on primary sources, translating the Y*oga Sūtras* into Arabic. The Hinduism that he describes is the Purāṇic and Sastric Hinduism of everyday life, focused on rituals for birth, death and weddings, on pilgrimages, fasts, festivals, auspicious and inauspicious times. Yet he is also interested in the scholarly work of the day, commenting at length on the sciences of astronomy and grammar. To some extent his own observations confirm the focus of later European scholars: he comments on the four *varṇas*, the worship of images, the soul, rebirth and *mokṣa*, the pre-eminence of the brahmins, and he gives particular consideration to the Vedas, the Purāṇas and the epic

history of 'Vāsudeva and the wars of the Bharata'. Like an anthropologist, he directly observes customs concerning inheritance, law, childbirth and sexual relations, charity, diet and echoing the complaints of modern philologists; he notes that Indian culture is divided between vernacular and classical languages, and that Sanskrit has a puzzling range of possible meanings for each word.

Al-Biruni's work also displays his own perennialist concerns to show commonality between Hindu and Abrahamic (particularly Muslim) religions, and also explicitly expresses the superiority of Islam. Like later Christian interpreters, he saw the widespread polytheism and image-based worship of the temples as a lower form of worship in the common people, and prioritized the vedāntic ideas as the 'true' Hinduism of the learned. Nevertheless, unlike many later observers, he feels little need to demonize Hinduism and instead shows great regard for the culture. Other Muslim observers include Ibn Battutah, who passed through India and made numerous observations in passing, noting that the 'Gang' was India's holy river to which the dead were brought and their ashes scattered, that matriarchal families were the norm in the parts of the Malabar coast that he had visited and that *satī* was practised (on his account willingly) by widows in the north. The Mughal Emperor Akbar showed an extraordinary enthusiasm for study, translation and discussion of almost all religious traditions present at the time in India. Some of the resulting studies written by Muslims born in India were sympathetic to some of the ideas they described, and aimed to make them available in the Islamic world – thus, for instance, Dara Shikuh (1615–1659) translated the Upaniṣads into Persian under the title 'The Great Secret'. It was this text which would be the source of a flourishing of European interest in Vedānta, via Antequil Duperron's Latin translation, read by Arthur Schopenhauer and others.

Missionaries, Philosophers and Comparativists

Some of the earliest European students of Hinduism were missionaries, inspired both by the ulterior motive of conversion and the desire to take Hinduism seriously as a theological tradition. In 1498 Vasco de Gama arrived in Calicut, initiating a long history of European trading, missionary and eventually ruling presence in India. Syriac Christian or Nestorian Christian communities had already existed on the western coast for centuries, and this group had developed its own localized style of 'Hindu-Christian' religious life. But the onset of Catholic missionaries in the early modern period initiated a new phase of missionary activity, taking an interest in Hindu traditions and texts in order to understand how better to introduce Christian ideas in a persuasive way. Missionary Jesuits had experienced some success in converting low-caste communities on the western coast of India, but this was followed by a realization

that many group-conversions had not really changed the underlying beliefs and practices of those communities, and the brahmins, who were seen as the religious specialists of the Hindu community, had not been affected. Thus a more sophisticated religious engagement was sought that would attract higher-caste and scholarly groups of Hindus, having a deeper impact on religious belief.

Roberto de Nobili (1577–1656) is the most well-known and influential of these Catholic missionary scholars, presenting himself as a Catholic 'brahmin' in order to express his sincere engagement with the Hindu tradition of theological reflection and scholarship. De Nobili learned Sanskrit, Tamil and Telugu and sought to understand the socio-religious structures that marked out brahmins as respected religious figures, adapting his diet and interaction with lower-caste Hindus so that he would be eligible for interaction with higher castes according to the rules of ritual purity – a controversial strategy which produced much debate among his Christian colleagues. He studied Hindu theological scriptures to find indigenous notions of the divine for which he could express sympathy and encouragement; thus, for instance, Christian Hindus could be encouraged to think of liturgical prayer and ritual as *pūjā*, and the Eucharist as *prasāda*. With the observation and writings of other missionaries, such as the Augustinian Agostinho de Azevedo and the Protestants Henry Lord and Abraham Roger in the seventeenth century, the trend for reports on Hinduism increased interest in Europe, and by 1733, Hindu textual scholars had collaborated with French Jesuit missionary J. F. Pons to produce a Sanskrit grammar in Latin that would form the basis for the study of Indian traditions as a serious academic subject.

Some of these missionaries brought the scholarly techniques of Christian theological tradition to bear on the Hindu religious traditions that they encountered. The fact that their main concern was with religious life in real contemporary communities also led them to give some of the first ethnographic accounts of Hindu practice. Some sought to learn the languages that would give them access to India's theological traditions and their high-caste brahmin proponents. De Nobili's writings are still illuminating – his informants were brahmins of the period and their self-description provides a valuable resource on contemporary Hindu self-understanding. But there were limitations to the approach taken by missionaries; evangelical motivations led to biases in their range of interest and their interpretations. The range of apologetic strategies adopted were both assimilationist as in Batholomaus Ziegenbalg's intimation that Hinduism is fundamentally monotheistic, and in the case of Protestant missionaries, declamatory of the 'Catholic' aspects of Hindu religion. There was also censure with particular regard to polytheism, the worship of images which was identified with biblical 'idolatry', and sexual ideas and practices in Tantra. William Ward wrote of the Tantric texts he read, that 'Here things too abominable to enter the ears of man, and impossible to be revealed to a Christian public, are contained' (Ward

in Urban, 1999, p. 128). But others noted that Tantra seemed to be largely a theoretical philosophy for the majority of practitioners, and in any case active practice went on behind closed doors, and usually between married couples.

Missionary publications became the main sources for the Western public's ideas about Indian religions, disseminated in series such as the *Hallesche Berichte* (1710–1772), *Lettres Edifiantes et Curieuse* (1702–1776) and summaries such as the *Ceremonies et Coutumes Religieuses de Tous les Peuples du Monde* (1723). Such sources could be as misleading as they were educational: in 1778 an anonymous text called the *Ezour Vedam* surfaced, claiming to be a translation of a Vedic text offering access to 'real' Hindu ideas. It was influential on thinkers such as Voltaire, but soon turned out to be a fake created by a mischievous enthusiast. The incident demonstrates the extent of interest in Indian ideas during the period in which Western religious identities were being negotiated against the framework of an increasingly global view of religion. It also demonstrates, however, the way in which fiction compromised fact in many of these early studies, unchecked by any scholarly methodology or peer review. The logic of analogy reigned in many missionary comparisons of Hindu and Western ideas, as it turned out to be easy to find familiar-sounding places and events in the vast narrative resource of the Epics and Purāṇas. One protestant missionary, Francis Wilford, even sought to corroborate biblical accounts of history by asking Indians whether they knew comparable stories from their own texts.

This sort of interest paved the way for a new approach to the study of Hinduism that explicitly sought to identify similarities between the traditions. Some pursued them as a confirmation that the same universal concerns or shared sources of inspiration were active in different cultures. Groups such as the Theosophical Society inspired interest in Indian religious ideas by portraying them as purer revelations of spiritual truth than those that were available in Western religions. Its development in 1875 under the guidance of the Ukrainian writer Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and the American spiritualist Henry Olcott led to a popular, institutionalized interest in Indian and Tibetan religions. Although little real knowledge about Indian religions was conveyed by Blavatsky's books *Isis Unveiled, The Secret Doctrine, The Key to Theosophy* and *The Voice of the Silence* or by the activities of the society, the society's avowed aim 'to encourage the study of comparative religion, philosophy and science' encouraged Europeans to take an interest in Buddhist and Hindu ideas. The Theosophical Society's headquarters in London and Madras became important points of contact for Europeans interested in Indian religious traditions, and later associates of the society such as Annie Besant and Jiddu Krishnamurti were also influential figures in popular culture drawing on personal experience of Indian life.

Literary popularizers aided in this project of presenting India to a Western audience: while Charles Wilkins had written the first English translation of the

Bhagavad Gītā in 1785, the most popular English version was created by **Sir Edwin Arnold** in 1885, published under the title *The Song Celestial*. After studying in London and Oxford, Arnold had become principal of the Government Deccan College in Pune between 1856 and 1861, and on his return to Victorian England, still enamoured of India, he published a poetic biography of the Buddha, *The Light of Asia,* in 1879, a translation of the *Hitopadeśa*'s animal fables, and a rendering of the *Bhagavad Gītā* (based on a 1882 translation by John Davies) six years later. Arnold saw his translations as a simple project of popularizing a culture that he had come to love:

> The 'perfect language' [i.e. Sanskrit] has been hitherto regarded as the province of scholars, and few of these even have found time or taste to search its treasures. And yet among them is the key to the heart of modern India – as well as the splendid record of her ancient Gods and glories. The hope of Hindostan lies in the intelligent interest of England. Whatever avails to dissipate misconceptions between them, and to enlarge their intimacy, is a gain to both peoples . . . A residence in India, and close intercourse with the Hindoos, have given the author a lively desire to subserve their advancement. (Arnold in the introduction to his translation of the *Hitopadeśa*)

Certainly, *The Light of Asia* helped to fuel Victorian interest in Buddhism, and the *Song Celestial* was calculated to appeal to contemporary British tastes, and was subsequently praised by Gandhi. Others sought to study religious similarities as an extension of research in the social sciences – categorizing Indian traditions among other 'types' of religion, much as Linnaeus had categorized plants and Darwin had studied animal species. **Friedrich Max Müller** (1823–1900), the influential Oxford Indologist, saw his own study of Hindu culture in relation to European culture, as a continued search for the universal categories of human thought that Immanuel Kant had outlined in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, of which Müller produced his own translation. In his introduction to the 'Sacred Books of the East' series of translations of which he was the founder, Müller explained the universalist spirit in which Indian religious texts should be studied:

> Plato is strange till we know him . . . so it is with these ancient sages, who have become the founders of the great religions of antiquity. They can never be judged from without, they can only be judged from within. We need not become Brahmans, or Buddhists or Taosze altogether, but we must for a time, if we wish to understand, and still more, if we are bold enough to undertake to translate their doctrines. Whoever shrinks from that effort will hardly see anything in these sacred books or their translations but matter to wonder at or to laugh at; possibly something to

> make him thankful that he is not as other men. But to the patient reader these same books will, in spite of many drawbacks, open a new view of the history of the human race, of that one race to which we all belong, with all the fibres of our flesh, with all the fears and hopes of our soul. We cannot separate ourselves from those who believed in these sacred books. (Müller, 1879, p. xxxvii)

Müller argued that, while the Vedas were a 'wild confusion of sublime truth with vulgar stupidity', a historically sensitive and text-critical academic view would note that Western scriptures also contain a mixture of philosophical or moral with other archaic material, and went on to suggest that reading Indian texts is like reading the New Testament in indiscriminate combination with the 'wrangling' of early Christian councils. Perhaps most telling is his critique of William Jones, who had condemned Antequil Duperron's *Zend Avesta* translation as a work conveying mere obscurities. Müller argues that here Jones as a 'man of taste', clouded the judgement of Jones as a scholar. Müller was courted by the Theosophical Society, but retained his own Lutheranism, nevertheless maintaining links with the Brahmo Samāj, the abstract Neo-Vedāntic theology of which he approved.

Throughout this period of growing theological interest in Hinduism, another discipline was similarly taking in interest in the idea that Indian culture offered an alternative trajectory of intellectual development from that found in Europe and America. **Anquetil Duperron** (1731–1805) had been a major mediator of interest in India to European philosophers. A scholar who had studied theology and oriental languages in Paris, and accompanied his translation of the Persian Avesta in 1771 with an account of his own travels through India, Duperron next offered a critical view of previous Orientalist approaches to Hinduism, and suggested more sympathetic perspectives on Hindu belief and ritual that caught the imagination of his readers. In 1802 he translated a Persian version of fifty Upanishads into Latin, and this text was highly influential on Schopenhauer and through him, on other Western thinkers including Friedrich Nietzsche and Richard Wagner. Naturally the translation was flawed as it had passed from Sanskrit through Persian to Duperron's Latin and into the vernacular of the reader. Nevertheless for many in Europe and America it was their first encounter with Indian thought, and already used to taking ancient Greek texts from a similar period as the basis of their philosophical reflections, a number of philosophers were now impressed by the fresh perspective of this new ancient culture, noting the way in which it addressed ontological and epistemological questions that were also current in the German idealist and phenomenological movements.

Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860) is perhaps the most well-known Western philosophical admirer of Vedānta. Schopenhauer had already formed the

foundations of his own philosophical thought in his dissertation, before being exposed to the Upaniṣads in 1813 by Friedrich Majer, a student of Oriental languages. This interest was further deepened during his writing of *The World as Will and Representation* through conversations with his neighbour Karl Friedrich Christian Krause, who knew some Sanskrit and was enthusiastic about the broadly pantheistic metaphysics described in certain sections of the Upaniṣads, and through readings of background material gained in the *Asiatisches Magazin*. Schopenhauer wrote in the 1818 preface to the first edition of his *The World as Will and Representation*, that:

> . . . access [to the Vedas] . . . opened to us by the Upanishads, is in my view the greatest advantage which this still young century has to show over previous centuries, since I surmise that the influence of Sanskrit literature will penetrate no less deeply than did the revival of Greek literature in the fifteenth century; if, I say, the reader has already received and assimilated the divine inspiration of ancient Indian wisdom, then he is best of all prepared to hear what I have to say to him . . . for did it not sound too conceited, I might assert that each of the individual and disconnected utterances that make up the Upanishads could be derived as a consequence from the thought I am about to impart, although conversely my thought is by no means to be found in the Upanishads. (Schopenhauer, 1969, pp. xv–xvi)

However Schopenhauer's reading was influenced by a concurrent interest in Buddhist thought, and he interpreted both Indian traditions as advocating a deeply pessimistic, almost stoic rejection of the world, human desires and the idea that history progresses towards a culminating goal. Other thinkers found other elements to admire or reject in the limited range of Hindu texts with which they came into contact. **G. W. F. Hegel** (1770–1831) was an influential Professor of Philosophy in Berlin who became interested in Indian culture as part of the larger project of a world history of philosophical and religious thought, undertaken in his *Lectures in the Philosophy of Religion.* Using the works of H. T. Colebrook and Wilhelm von Humboldt, he explored what he saw as a monistic Hindu outlook using the *Bhagavad Gītā* as his main source text. However his portrayal of Indian thought was deeply reductive, as it was rooted in his desire to characterize each culture in terms of a single fundamental insight or ethical motivation. This account of Indian religion reduced it to an ontologically monist metaphysics in which all individuals are collapsed into a single encompassing reality that both assimilates and destroys their individual character. He saw this as a major flaw that deprived Indian culture of any sense of progress, oriented as it was towards an ultimate reality defined as so completely transcendent that it could not illuminate the worldly realm of human life. Hegel blamed this transcendentalism for the supposed stasis of Indian

culture as a whole, and interpreted the diverse mythology and iconography of Hindu religious traditions merely as a popular 'escape' from the repression of these ideas.

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), who began his career as a classicist and brought an interest in classical texts to his thought, incorporated his own very subjective readings of key Indian texts into works such as *Twilight of the Idols* and *Beyond Good and Evil*. He believed that there was a family resemblance between Greek, Indian and German philosophizing due to the similarity in Indo-European grammars which each had inherited, and he saw Vedānta as a totalizing metaphysical system comparable to the philosophy of Plato. In particular, he made use of the *Mānava Dharma Śāstra* as a text to demonstrate the 'slave-mentality' to which he believed a world-rejecting attitude was bound to lead. His readings were generally inaccurate in their interpretation of the original texts, and contributed to the trend for Western secondary readings of ill-translated texts that were aimed primarily at making a point about particular philosophical concepts and contrasts. By contrast, **Karl Wilhelm Friedrich von Schlegel** (1772–1829) was from a family that had genuine experience of Hindu culture, through his brothers Carl August Schlegel who served a military term in India, and August Wilhelm Schlegel who taught Sanskrit as a professor at the University of Bonn. Friedrich von Schlegel complemented his own research in Indian philology, history and philosophy, studying Sanskrit with Alexander Hamilton, and eventually writing an 1808 work on Indian thought called, 'On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians'. Nevertheless his own view, also comparative in a negative sense, was that Hinduism represented a deterioration from the monotheism seen in Abrahamic traditions to the monism found in the Upaniṣads.

A more positive appropriation of Indian ideas was found in the work of Hermann Jacobi, who read Kauṭilya's *Artha Śāstra* and, in contrast to Hegel, claimed that Kauṭilya, in writing about *ānvīkṣikī*, had defined philosophical inquiry itself. Jacobi is cited as an influence by the American Unitarian pastor and Transcendentalist writer **Ralph Waldo Emerson.** In England and America new movements such as the **Unitarians** and **Transcendentalists** found inspiration in the Indian perspectives with which they had become familiar, usually varieties of Vedānta such as those encountered in the Upaniṣad translations or in the words of Swami Vivekananda and other 'Neo-Vedāntists'. This second-hand Vedānta was taken seriously enough to be discussed both in churches and in universities. At the Harvard Divinity School in 1838, Emerson explained to an audience of Divinity students that:

> . . . the world is not the product of manifold power, but of one will, of one mind; and that one mind is everywhere active, in each ray of the star, in each wavelet of the pool . . . This thought dwelled always deepest in the

> minds of men in the devout and contemplative East; not alone in Palestine, where it reached its purest expression, but in Egypt, in Persia, in India, in China. (Emerson, 1985, pp. 110–11)

Henry Thoreau (1817–1862) encouraged a similarly positive appreciation of Indian ideas, but with a distinct disregard for the accurate and detailed understanding available through scholarly study, writing that 'While the commentators are disputing about the meaning of this word and that, I hear only the resounding of the ancient sea, and put into it all the meaning that I am possessed of, the deepest murmurs I can recall, for I do not in the least care where I get my ideas or what suggests them' (Thoreau in Sharpe, 1975, p. 24).

Many of these philosophical thinkers took a genuine interest in Indian thought, respecting it for the outlook and insights of the tradition. But as Thoreau's statement demonstrates, their interest was not academic in the sense of presenting an accurate picture and aiming to stay true to insider interpretations of the tradition. Furthermore their view of that intellectual tradition tended to be a highly restricted one; initial translation of the Upaniṣads and Buddhist texts led to a characterization of all Indian thought as monistic, ascetic and highly speculative in nature. This would come to contrast with the rituals observed by travellers, colonialists and later anthropologists, resulting in a tension between philosophical theory and ritual practice within Western views of Hinduism that is today being resolved by more nuanced understandings of ritual, and the juxtaposition of textual and anthropological study. Nevertheless these and other thinkers encouraged study of Hinduism as a partner to Western religious and philosophical traditions, which was perhaps better or worse, but essentially of the same nature. They gradually encouraged the public to look at Hinduism as a potential resource in their own religious life. However, by setting up Hinduism as an alternative to the religions of the West, such views necessarily addressed it as an 'other' – paradigmatically different such that it could provide what the West lacked, but also lacked what the West possessed. This perspective was dubbed 'Orientalism', and popularized as a widespread attitude in need of critical deconstruction by Edward Said's book of the same name. Following the recognition of this double-sided admiration and denigration of Asian traditions, the biases that were promoted by early interest in Hinduism are still being corrected by scholars today.

Indologists, Classicists and Colonialists

The first missionary dictionaries, grammars and translations laid the foundations for a systematic study of indigenous Indian sources as objects of interest in their own right. This study was motivated by two different concerns that

became entangled in the early stages of Hindu Studies: classicists saw Indian culture as a new field of scholarly interest, with goals similar to those of Greek and Latin scholarship, while colonialists saw knowledge of Indian culture as a tool for more effective rule and administration of India itself. While these two goals were very different in nature, they nevertheless became allied in the colonial milieu of modern India, where for the first time large numbers of Westerners found themselves in Indian societies learning from original manuscripts, and in some cases discussing them with traditional pundits, and observing festivals, rituals and arts directly. This delicate interplay of those different goals brought a subtle bias to the study of Hindu cultures by classicists and colonialists, and coloured ways in which Hindu religion would be depicted in the still-developing European academic establishments of the time.

On the one hand, **Greek and Roman classical philology** had long been a core discipline in European universities, and the extension of trade into Africa, Asia and the Middle East had revealed other vast civilizations to be discovered through the mastery of Arabic, Persian, Chinese, Sanskrit and other classical languages. After the appointment of August Wilhelm Schlegel as Professor of Sanskrit in Bonn in 1818, and Antoine-Leonard de Chezy in the Sanskrit Chair at the College de France in 1815, classicists came to adopt the study of Sanskrit as an extension of the existing discipline of classical language and civilization, and Sanskrit became a normal part of the curriculum in many faculties. The classical perspective provided a better platform for the study of Hinduism than Christian biblical and theological disciplines had done: classicists were also accustomed to the study of cultures in which multiple gods and temple worship of images figured prominently. Techniques of philology, manuscriptology, paleography, text criticism and historical contextualization were already available and ready for application to this new culture. The philological background caused scholars to emphasize textual study to a high degree, resulting in detailed engagement with primary sources. However, as their model was the study of classical Greek and Latin – dead languages – they had little notion of how these texts might be studied as the product of living religious traditions. Nevertheless, the study of Hinduism was transformed by the beginnings of genuine research into critically edited manuscripts by trained linguists. For almost the first time, sources from a range of regions and periods began to be correlated in a balanced overview of the traditions. The years from 1855–1875 saw the publication of a Sanskrit-German dictionary by Rudolf von Roth and Otto von Bohtlingk, laying concrete foundations for the emerging discipline of Sanskrit studies. At the same time, a selection of publishing houses, such as Harrassowitz and Athlone, began to develop a special interest in scholarly Indian texts.

On the other hand, scholars involved in the colonial project had more practical and immediate motivations for their study of Indian culture. Having begun as an extension of the study of classical civilizations, Indology became allied

with the growing colonial presence in India. Indian centres of British trade, militarily defended by the East India Company, were becoming *de facto*, and later *official*, centres of overseas rule. Setbacks such as the 1857 'mutiny' of the Indian population against British rule made it clear that these economic-political bodies needed geographical, sociological, linguistic and cultural information in order to govern such a vast territory and culture effectively, and Indologists were given financial backing for their aid by their colonial employers. The work that was produced from this patronage was much affected by the asymmetry of the situation in which the British visited and left the subcontinent, conveying limited information back to Europe, while introducing and often imposing their own influences on Indians who had no direct experience of the society in whose image they were being encouraged to shape themselves. Indians had little access to Britain and almost no control over the ways in which their own culture was represented in the West; Vivekananda, Aurobindo and Gandhi were very much the exceptions rather than the rule. There was also a strong rhetorical element in colonial scholarship that sought to justify Western domination and the actions it entailed. Such polemic both elevated India as a civilization worthy of attention, and denigrated it as a culture morally and materially unable to govern itself. This perspective was exemplified in James Mill's 1817 *History of British India*, which conveyed the image of an ancient and unchanging civilization and suggested that modern India gave a view of what the ancient world was like in the period of Cyrus and Alexander (Thomas, 1975, p. xxvi).

Max Müller combined German Indological methods with colonial concerns: his career as a Sanskritist was built on a foundation of comparative philology and philosophical study in Leipzig, Berlin and Paris, yet he was a scholar of Hinduism who never went to India, and a member of the British colonial establishment, bank-rolled by the East India Company. He went on to a professorship in Oxford where a new chair emphasizing comparative study was created for him by the university. His approach to Hinduism was that of a scholar of secular culture, working primarily on literary texts such as the *Hitopadeśa*, Kālidāsa's *Meghadūta* and on the hymns of the *Ṛg Veda;* his own view of religion was influenced by the contemporary trend towards the 'demythologization' of Christian doctrines by scholars such as Feuerbach and Bultmann. The practical concerns of the British left little room for religious reflection; languages had to be learned, legal texts had to be studied in order to govern effectively, and accurate data about populations, economies and landscapes had to be gathered. The move to establish English as the official language of India in 1835 led to a continuing process of negotiating indigenous meanings in English idioms. In many ways, just as the classical background of Indology provided a model for humanistic interest in ancient Indian culture, the colonial context set the agenda for the pragmatic sociological study of Indian history and society, divested of the confessional tone that had predominated in both positive and negative theological work.

Monier Monier-Williams (1819–1899), whose Sanskrit dictionary is still in use by students today, was also very much a product of British colonialism. Born in Bombay as the son of the surveyor-general of the Bombay presidency, Williams studied at the East India Company's Haileybury College and at Oxford, where he learned Sanskrit under H. H. Wilson, whom he succeeded as Boden Professor of Sanskrit. His 1872 English-Sanskrit dictionary is still in use, and his engagement with India's living traditions is demonstrated in his editing and translation of the *Siksapatri*, a key text of the Swaminarayan tradition that is flourishing in the UK today: the manuscript on which his translation was based is in Oxford's Ashmolean museum and has become an item of pilgrimage. Monier-Williams' position as Boden Professor in Oxford was surrounded by some controversy however, as many favoured Max Müller for the chair, and it was rumoured that Monier-Williams was chosen less on the basis of his aptitude than because he seemed more likely to uphold traditional Christian values in his approach to Hinduism. Nevertheless Monier-Williams' own study drew on texts that he had sourced himself, and interpretations that had been discussed with traditional Hindu scholars in India.

With time, Indological sponsorship had shifted from European academic faculties, to *in situ* study of Hindu culture within India itself. **William Jones** (1746–1794) was an accomplished linguist who acquired knowledge of Latin, Greek, Persian, Arabic, Hebrew, Chinese and Sanskrit through his studies at Oxford University. But it was the British empire that took him to Calcutta in 1783 as a judge, and only a year later he started the Asiatic Society there, realizing that India represented a rich culture ripe for the kind of discovery that had opened up the Mediterranean, Arab and East Asian cultures. Two years afterwards, in 1786, he suggested in *The Sanscrit Language* that Sanskrit, Greek and Latin all shared an origin in an earlier lost language, provoking a storm of philological study. He reiterated the suggestion in a speech to the Society on 2 February 1786:

> The Sanscrit language, whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs and the forms of grammar, than could possibly have been produced by accident; so strong indeed, that no philologer could examine them all three, without believing them to have sprung from some common source.

This field of speculation became connected with current debates on the origin of culture, and the homeland of the proposed 'Indo-European' civilization from which both European and Indian cultures were thought to have sprung. Jones translated Kālidāsa's play *Śakuntalā,* opening a new avenue of interest in Indian

culture through literature. The Asiatic Society, established in 1784 by Jones in Calcutta, and the Royal Asiatic Society, established as its British equivalent in 1823 by Henry Thomas Colebrook, became important centres for 'the investigation of subjects connected with and for the encouragement of science, literature and the arts in relation to Asia'. They would eventually include a number of important Indian thinkers such as Rabindranath Tagore among their members. In 1794 Jones also translated the *Laws of Manu*, which had practical applications to the British government's attempts to put a functioning Indian legal system in place. Nevertheless he was one of the colonial Indologists who, in making India his home, became devoted to the study of Hindu culture. In his letters he wrote 'I am in love with the Gopia, charmed with Crishen [Kṛṣṇa], an enthusiastick admirer of Ram' (Jones, 1970, p. 660).

Henry Thomas Colebrook (1765–1837) was another Englishman, posted to India in 1782, who became drawn to the study of Hindu culture for its own sake. After his arrival in Bengal he was encouraged to make himself more useful by learning Sanskrit, and he succeeded in translating two texts thought to be important in Hindu law, as a preliminary to becoming a judge. These texts, the *Mitākṣara* and the *Dāyabhāga,* were compendious legal texts with implications for property law and inheritance that had already been in use in most of North India. But as so often happened with those drawn to Indology initially for practical purposes, he soon moved in a more academic direction. He was appointed a professor of Hindu Law and Sanskrit at Fort William College, and went on to write studies on Hindu ritual and on the Vedas, later becoming a director of the Royal Asiatic Society.

Müller's younger assistant **George Thibaut** (1848–1914) held positions at Benares Hindu College, Muir College in Allahabad and Calcutta University, and brought a more direct knowledge of Hindu life to his study of its texts. He produced a critical edition of the *Ṛg Veda*, a translation of the *Brāhma Sūtra* that included the commentaries of Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja, and also also wrote on the Hindu sciences of mathematics and astronomy. The life of **Sir John Woodroffe** (1865–1936) is one of the most fascinating examples of scholarship arising out of colonial enthusiasm: an Indian-born British gentlemen-scholar, Woodroffe lived initially in Calcutta and, following a typical career path within the British-Indian society of the day, was educated in Britain and subsequently returned to become a judge within the Indian colonial legal system. But he had become interested in Tantra, and proceeded to take initiation from a brahmin Śākta Tantric guru, and also possibly (like Ramakrishna) a female Tantric guru or *bhairavi*, studying relevant texts with a fellow initiate, Atal Bihari Ghose, who was his main informant. He wanted to publicize and defend these texts and their ideas, but was aware that they had become taboo for Westerners due to the sexual ideas and practices discussed in them. From the time of his knighthood in 1915, he began to publish sanitized versions of Tantric texts such as the

Mahānirvāṇa Tantra under the pseudonymous name of Arthur Avalon, lecturing on Tantric concepts, and defending the value of Hindu ideas to British critics once he had taken up a position teaching law in Oxford. Despite being essentially an interested amateur, Woodroffe documented the difficulties of avoiding mistakes in translation and comprehension, writing that:

> In the translation of such works a Sanskrit dictionary (however excellent) is not either a sufficient or a reliable guide. It is necessary to study the Hindu commentators and to seek the oral aid of those who possess the traditional interpretation of the Śāstra. Without this and an understanding of what Hindu worship is and means, absurd mistakes are likely to be made . . . As regards the Tantra, the great Sādhana Śāstra, nothing which is of both an understanding and accurate character can be achieved without a study of the original texts undertaken with the assistance of Tantrik gurus and pandits, who are the authorised custodians of its tradition. (Avalon [Woodroffe], 1982, p. ix)

He also lamented the distaste for Tantric ideas among European-educated Indians, as well as among his British readers:

> It is because such English-educated Indians are as uninstructed in the matter as that rather common *type* of western to whose mental outlook and opinions they mould their own, that it was possible to find a distinguished member of this class describing Mantra as 'meaningless jabber'. Indian doctrines and practice have been so long and so greatly misunderstood and misrepresented by foreigners, that it has always seemed a pity that those who are of this *Puṇyabhūmi* should, through misapprehension, malign without reason anything which is their own. (Woodroffe [Avalon], 2001, p. ix)

Other Europeans in India also became involved in the eclectic opening-up of diverse Indian materials to the West, and to new audiences in India itself. The establishment of Indology as a serious textual discipline for which library collections of original manuscripts were essential, was decisively influenced by **Otto Schrader** (1876–1961). Emerging from the German Indological tradition, his doctoral work on Buddhist and Jain thought led to his appointment as the director of the Adyar Library of the Theosophical Society in Madras. From this point he combined study of vernacular languages with the collection of manuscripts, studying Dravidian languages in South India and expanding the library's collection. Schrader took the opportunity afforded by internment by the British during the First World War to add Tibetan and Thai to his knowledge. Later, as Professor of Indology at the University of Kiel he was able to publish a critical edition of the minor Upaniṣads, a translation of the Kashmir recension

of the *Bhagavad Gītā,* an introduction to Pāñcarātra thought, and an introduction to Hinduism that incorporated direct extracts from both Sanskrit and Tamil texts. The academic world was finally on the way to a more comprehensive and objective approach to the study of Hinduism.

Anthropologists, Sociologists and Modern Hindu Studies

Jones, Thibaut, Colebrook, Woodroffe, Schrader and others found their perspective influenced by experience of the Indian tradition, but while their research focused on the Hinduism of ancient texts, a new wave of scholars in emerging disciplines began to study contemporary Hinduism in a more direct way. The first sociologists of Indian society were the colonial researchers who eschewed textual concerns in order to pursue logistical information about the Indian populace. Administrators needed to know about the size, structure and government of communities, and they soon found that the complex subcommunities of castes and clans required close study. In addition legal rulings had to negotiate their way around local customs, requiring explanation from informants who could make Indian value systems understood. The geographers of the Survey of India had the task of producing accurate maps of a vast landscape – but more difficult was the task of drawing boundary lines upon it. This required discussion with local residents and rulers, and some knowledge of past polities in a country that had seen many successive kingdoms and empires.

The attempt to make sense of the innumerable local *jātis* and familial clan-affiliations across the country in a coherent way resulted in the 1907–1909 *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, a work of informal sociological analysis. However this project of categorization had merged with the comparative goals of linguistic scholars, resulting in the development of a new area of interest: Indian ethnology. In 1869 the president of the Ethnological Society of London invited participants to enjoy ' . . . the wealth of contributions from Indian veterans, speaking with long practical experience of the country and its people . . . ' and explained that 'the particular jungle which I wish to clear is that ignorance of India and all that belongs to it, which characterises the general English mind'. He goes on to describe the picture that had become customary of the pale northern and dark southern peoples of India. In the employ of the empire, Herbert Risley (1851–1911) published a study of the Indian racial 'types' in 1908, and his interest matched the growth of British inclinations towards constructing a Darwinian developmental scheme of races and cultures. In Cambridge, the early anthropologist J. G. Frazer was currently collating information on diverse religious practices, both ancient and modern, in order to arrange them into a global ladder of progress from magical to religious styles of philosophy. Frazer's general

theories were rapidly discredited by more exacting scholars, but his report on the spring rites of 'Rali ka Mela' in which girls perform a marriage between clay images of Śiva and Pārvatī, then submerge them into a river at the end of the festival, demonstrates that the observation and reportage of Hindu practices was under way (Frazer, 1993, pp. 320–1).

The work of figures such as Frazer and E. B. Tylor inspired the development of anthropology as an academic discipline in universities around Europe, and serious anthropologists began to arrive in India, fascinated by its elaborate rituals and social structures. In the early stages of the discipline it was widely seen as being at an earlier stage of cultural, religious and even racial development than European cultures and was thus studied as a 'fossil' – a preserved piece of the ancient past. With greater understanding, however, anthropological research made closer and more accurate studies of Indian society, and soon Indians had become some of the most effective and enthusiastic anthropologists, discovering unknown tribes and traditions within their own land. **M. N. Srinivas** (1916–1999) was a key figure in the development of Indian anthropology. From study with A. R. Radcliffe-Brown who had visited India, to early fieldwork among hill-tribes in Coorg, Srinivas developed an important critical discourse on issues and approaches to the study of Indian society, strongly advocating participant-observer methods. With Indian independence and self-rule, the need for more detailed knowledge of Indian society, including what were known as scheduled castes and tribes, became urgent as administrative measures had to be taken and also many claims for regional independence had to be assessed and negotiated. International changes in the theoretical underpinning of anthropology also influenced approaches to India. By drawing on structuralist, Marxist and Weberian models of social hierarchy, **Louis Dumont** (1911–1998) transformed the tradition of sociological study, which had remained a fairly logistical project of cataloguing and describing the constituent groups in each community, into a more sophisticated project of explaining the meanings and motivations behind Hindu religion. Dumont's 1966 study of caste in *Homo Hierarchicus* incorporated both classical Sanskrit texts and an ethnographic case study, and his work remains enormously influential both on views of the caste system, and on contemporary methods for studying Hinduism. More recently, scholars have sought to overcome long-standing misapprehensions or misrepresentations of Hinduism by searching for more accurate paradigms for understanding its key ideas and practices. Frits Staal spoke for many modern scholars when he wrote in 1996 of his efforts to understand Vedic mantras through existing concepts of ritual:

> In the course of this work, it dawned on me that these data were extraordinary, and that no-one knew how to account for them. Relevant specialists – Indologists, anthropologists, psychologists, or scholars of

> religion – offered no conceptual tools that I could use. If I wanted to go beyond mere description and offer explanations, I had to strike out on my own. (Staal, 1996, p. xiii)

Beyond the British colonial and German Indological traditions, Sanskrit, Indian and Hindu Studies thrived internationally in academic traditions of research, each with its own historical roots. In Japan, which has a long history of Indian influence through Buddhist culture, the study of Sanskrit flourished, while the Chinese scholar Ji Xian risked punishment during the cultural revolution to continue his Chinese translation of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in secret. Russia also nurtured a strong interest in India and a concurrent Indological tradition which produced important scholars of Buddhism such as Sergey Oldenburg and Fyodor Stcherbatsky and Otto von Bohtlingk. The Dutch and Austrians, who had long been traders on the Malabar coast, developed their own Indological and – in the case of Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf in Assam – anthropological studies, while French colonial holdings in the south of India led to the establishment of the Institut Francais de Pondicherry in 1955, which under the leadership of Jean Filliozat became an important centre for the study of Tamil and particularly Tantric traditions of Hinduism.

The publication in 1978 of Edward Said's *Orientalism* was influential in encouraging Hinduism scholars to explore the history of scholarship in the field as a medium for gaining, expressing and consolidating power over Hindus themselves. It became clear that study undertaken under the influence of cultures engaged in colonialism tended to reflect and contribute to colonial attitudes of dominance. Scholars have since become more sensitive to the ways in which their work can support or oppose propaganda. The reification of Hinduism as a single tradition can seem to alienate the influence of other religions and communities, reinforcing religious boundaries. Debates over the origins of Aryan culture, and the location of key sites mentioned in the epics, have become highly politicized by groups aiming to lay claim to land as being historically 'Hindu', and studies seen as pejorative have been targeted by some groups as 'anti-Hindu'.

Thus the study of Hinduism has become permeated both by theoretical debates about religion, society and interpretation, and also by political concerns, many of which stem from the long-term effects of colonial government on Indian culture and its representation by scholars who are usually part of Western or Western-style educational institutions. It is in response to these and other challenges that the various disciplines discussed in Chapter 5 on research methods, including philological, literary, historical, sociological, anthropological, archaeological, art historical, philosophical, theological and interdisciplinary study, have developed a heightened conscience about the use of appropriate methodologies in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Note

1. Eric Sharpe would argue for more stringent criteria, adding that a valid study of religion must have a motive for study, access to first- or second-hand information, and a 'method by which to organise the material into an intelligible pattern' (*Comparative Religion: A History,* Great Britain: Duckworth and Co. Ltd, 1975, p. 2). But many of the early students of Hinduism reflected on the religion without a clearly articulated methodology, as part of observations on travel, debate or theological contrasts observed in their own and other practices. We prefer here not to leave out the important and influential thinkers that these criteria would exclude.

4 Current Approaches: Articles on Key Themes

Chapter Outline

Hindu Cosmologies

Angelika Malinar

Cosmology implies the narrating, mapping, analysing and explaining of the emergence and interconnection of the basic elements of life, and the different spheres of existence. Questions about the beginning of the world, the origin and nature of living beings and their role in the process of creation have received a huge variety of answers in Hindu religions of the past and present. These questions are answered by embedding them in the range of mythological, theological, philosophical an as well as normative frameworks of meaning that have been

established in Hindu religious communities and the textual traditions they follow.

In the Hindu context cosmology is intrinsically connected with religious meaning and practice and not primarily regarded as the field of natural sciences. However, the findings of modern science have not remained unnoticed by the representatives of Hindu religions; and this perhaps even more so because the introduction of 'reason' and 'scientific' methods that would replace 'religious superstition' were part and parcel of the British colonial enterprise. Traditional cosmologies became targets of critique in the British colonial period, especially when they were seen as providing justification for social hierarchies, constructions of gender and belief in 'invisible powers' that would create obstacles for the educational, social and political reform projects envisioned by colonial administrators as well as by Hindu reformers. Sometimes irreconcilable differences emerged between those who would stick to the cosmological visions and descriptions handed down in the sacred texts, and Western science.

Yet, in many cases Hindu theologians and philosophers would attempt to accommodate the new ideas and methods, and to mediate them within the framework of meaning provided in religious traditions. This resulted in various blends of religious and scientific ideas that in many cases still need to be explored in greater detail. One example of such 'syncretistic cosmologies' is the adoption of the scheme of evolution as a gradual emergence of 'higher' forms of life and religion in the work of Bhaktivinode Thakura (1836–1914), prominent exponent of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava theology, who regarded the devotional path to liberation mapped out in the Caitanya tradition as the culmination of Hindu religion (see Dasa, 1999). Such openness to new ideas is not only a feature of cosmological models offered in modern Hinduism, but is also detectable in the older traditions, when classical Indian sciences such as medicine or grammar were referred to in order to support cosmological models. Irrespective of differences in details, the emphasis on the normative and practical implications of the different cosmological models remains a characteristic feature of Hindu cosmologies. Cosmology is not only a past event that brought about the creation of the world, but is also an ongoing process that implies certain patterns of order which need to be sustained and recreated. The created world mirrors basic elements and structures of activity implied in the cosmological models used for explaining its existence. Conversely, cosmology serves as a justification of social and political norms, taxonomies of lifestyle and constructions of gender as well as of religious doctrines and practices by turning them into something 'ordained' or 'natural'. Hindu cosmologies are thus intrinsically connected to different registers of normativity (social, religious, ritual, etc.). From a religious point of view, cosmologies also make it possible to postulate an absolute realm that transcends the earthly world and thereby represent the chance of salvation.

This essay will look at some general features of Hindu cosmologies and discuss sacrificial, Sāṃkhya and Purāṇic cosmologies in greater detail because of their importance in the history of Hindu religions as well as in contemporary Hindu religious communities. They can therefore be regarded as elements that connect different Hindu traditions and contribute to the 'family resemblances' between them. These examples may also serve to demonstrate the variety of models and concepts used for explaining cosmic holism. Furthermore, cosmology is intimately connected to religious practice as it provides maps and orientations in any religious quest, be it for liberation, empowerment or well-being in this life. It offers explanations for the relationship between the individual and other residents and regions of the cosmos by mapping the cosmic pathways on which the religious aspirant travels in order to reach its highest, liberating realm or else to obtain the fulfilment of his or her desires. Traditions of Yoga and of Tantric rituals can be considered prominent examples of practical applications of cosmological roadmaps.

General Features

By definition, cosmological models imply notions of 'wholeness' and 'completeness' and an idea of 'perfection' that goes along with them. This is actually one of the meanings of the Greek word '*kosmos*' referring to the world as an ordered, harmonious whole. Sanskrit equivalents for the word 'cosmos' include *sarga* or *sṛṣṭi* for the created world, as well as *sarva,* 'all, whole', and *viśva,* 'many, all'. As Gonda shows, the words for cosmos are connected to different aspects of completeness: '*viśva* – pointing out the inability to proceed after a certain total number has been counted, *sarva* – emphasizing the idea of wholeness and completeness and the inability to discern defectiveness' (Gonda, 1955, p. 54). Cosmological notions of 'totality' and 'completeness' are ascribed, for instance, to *brahman* and *mahān ātman* as the causes of creation in the Upaniṣads. The notions of becoming identical with *sarva* or envisioning *sarva* develop into goals of religious practice, depicted as states of perfect being and ultimate achievement (van Buitenen, 1964; Srinivasan, 199, pp. 83–95).

Cosmologies also imply notions of order and correctness that allow boundaries to be drawn within the created world, and which are referred to as *dharma*. This term designates, among others things, the sociocosmic 'order' that emerges when each class of beings and even each individual, follows the rules of correct behaviour that apply to each of them. However, the orderliness of the cosmos is regarded as something fragile and under threat by evil forces or by a general decay implied in the passing of time. In many Hindu cosmologies perfection is only available at the beginning of creation, whereas the 'present' is often depicted as an age of relative decay which calls either for specific, often new

religious pathways, or for the revitalization of lost religious teachings (von Stietencron, 1986). A stable spatial formation of the cosmos is often combined with a temporal conception of world epochs (*manvantara*) and world ages (*yuga*) characterized by a steady decline of cosmic order that necessitates the periodical destruction and recreation of the world. This allows such models to explain the tension between the idea of the cosmos as a stable order and the actual disorder and instability experienced in spheres dominated by human beings. As a consequence, cosmology often entails entities and institutions that sustain and protect the orderliness of the created world in order to prevent disorder as much as possible. Therefore cosmological accounts regularly report the manifestation of law-givers (so called Manus), revealed, sacred texts (Vedas for instance) and social institutions (such as caste or kingship) as a part of the creation of the world.

In this connection, social hierarchies and divisions are interpreted in terms of cosmological functions and thereby presented as something 'god-ordained' (*vihita*) or 'natural' (*svabhāvika*, *prākṛta*, *aupatika*), that is, implied in the causal processes that bring about the creation of the cosmos. Cosmology often carries taxonomies and notions of hierarchy indicative not only of the religious, but also the cultural and historical contexts in which they are embedded. Certain hierarchies or power relationships are considered axiomatic and often remain unexplained, such as the hierarchy of body parts in the Vedic cosmology based on sacrificial cooperation, when, for instance, the head is considered 'higher' than the feet; the superiority (and not only the priority) of causes (*kāraṇa*) over effects (*kārya*) and of subtle, invisible (*sūkṣma*, *avyakta*) entities over gross, visible (*sthūla*, *vyakta*) ones.

While usually being handed down as part of religious revelation, cosmologies mirror larger discourse formations of the society that propagate them as referential frameworks of meaning. Moreover, cosmologies are important in negotiating relationships between the different social groups as well as between the different classes of beings who inhabit various spheres of the cosmos (gods, demons, ancestors, animals, planets, etc.). In Hindu cosmologies, human beings are central for sustaining these relationships, but they are not at the centre of the cosmos. Rather, the human world has many borders and usually extends to other spheres (divine, ancestral, planetary, demonic, etc.) that may interfere with the human world in one way or the other. Cosmology makes it possible to set up – or to cross – boundaries in the human sphere by connecting them to other inhabitants, spheres, powers and times of the cosmos, a feature that can have significant implications for the power relationships in a certain social formation. Studies show how cosmological models are used to mediate and explain political and social change, or to accommodate the rise of new social groups to power. Such studies analyse the use of cosmology as an idiom for negotiating power relationships and social status.

In other contexts cosmologies are used to demonstrate the sacredness and cosmic necessity of the emergence of new religious places, teachers and methods (Malinar, 2007a). In this accommodation of historical change by reference to the cosmological plane, myths and legends play important roles. For instance, new dynasties were given a genealogy that connects them to the history of the cosmos and the emergence of the original royal lineages (see Kulke, 2004; Basu, 2004). Cosmological explanations make such accommodations possible because their juxtaposition of spatial (cosmography) and temporal (cosmic time) frameworks allows for the synchronization of historical events (such as new rulers and teachers) and different forms of time-reckoning accorded to different regions and rulers (royal eras for instance) as belonging to 'one' world (Malinar, 2007a).

The Beginning of the World: Primary Scenes

This function of temporal frameworks unfolds against the background of a repertoire of different scenarios and myths that explain or narrate the beginning of the world. Hindu cosmologies privilege certain activities as causing creation, for instance, distinct social practices like sacrifice, sexual intercourse and craftsmanship or cognitive processes such as self-awareness, desire, error or ignorance.

According to Eliade (1954) cosmological accounts envision and recreate the moment of beginning, that very moment in time (*illud tempus*) when the world began. Cosmologies can not only be distinguished according to the type of the ordered process that resulted in the creation of the world (emanation, coagulation etc.), but also according to the primary scenes (*Ur-Szenen*) that narrate how the beginning began. Some of these narratives imply metaphysical doctrines that were elaborated in subsequent philosophical and theological discourse and made the basis of religious practice. Sacrifice is the oldest model of cosmology, based on ideas of the cooperation and reciprocity of different agents that have remained influential in explaining the structure of the created world. However, the cosmological model of emanation as a gradual, top-down manifestation of the principles and elements of the created world as developed in the Upaniṣads and in Sāṃkhya philosophy can be considered the most influential. Both models allow for a variety of explanations of how and why creation began at all.

Sacrifice

The oldest extant Hindu cosmological notions are transmitted in Vedic literature that deals with the origins of the world in terms of sacrifice. The performance of a Vedic sacrifice (*yajña*) is the cosmogonic act *par excellence*. It is not only placed at the beginning of creation, but also persists as the *modus operandi* of the

created world, in that it is the instrument for a continuous recreation of a ritually structured universe. The 'sacrificial cosmology' is connected to specific notions of production and agency that are most prominently expressed in the idea of the 'dismembering' and 're-membering' of the first sacrificial victim, the *puruṣa*. No less important is the idea of the 'wheel of sacrifice(s)' as described for instance in the 'five fire doctrine' (*pañcāgnividyā*) in the Upaniṣads. Both notions had a considerable impact on the understanding of the cosmos as a realm characterized by the mutual interdependence of the inhabitants of the different cosmic realms. The cosmos is regarded as being created through cooperative ritual activities; it is a product of many agents and causes collaborating in cycles of reciprocity and mutual dependency (*paraspara*).

The famous *puruṣa*-hymn (*Ṛgveda* 10.90) describes the creation of the ritually and socially ordered world as the result of the performance of the first sacrifice undertaken by the gods. They sacrificed the *puruṣa*, the 'cosmic man', by dismembering the visible quarter of his gigantic body; a body, whose other three quarters extend beyond the world. It is told that the body parts became the different elements of the cosmos (his eyes became the sun, mind, the moon etc.). This 'biomorphic' or 'organic' model of society became most influential in providing a cosmological justification of the four-tiered caste-system consisting of the head (*brāhmaṇa*), the arms (*kṣatriya*), the thighs (*vaiśya*) and the feet (*śūdra*). Here, the social hierarchy of caste which places the priests and the warriors on top is interpreted as being inscribed in the cosmic order. All members of society are viewed as necessary parts of an organism that is only complete when all these groups exist and function as the 'limbs' of the body that is the social and ritual world. By drawing on the image of the male body as signifying organic completeness and perfect functionality, social stratification and division of labour are given symbolic unity. Mutual dependency and cooperative modes of activity are postulated as factors in cosmology. Relations of power are recast as relationships of hierarchical cooperation.

On the one hand, the body of society emerges by dismembering the body of a single sacrificial victim, which implies drawing distinctions through the allocation of different cosmic realms ('members'). On the other hand, this newly created body of society and cosmos is created by re-membering the parts of the *puruṣa* by re-uniting the separated groups as parts of the ritual order that functions on the basis of the cooperation of all parts. This model expresses larger sacrificial concerns about 'gaining life from destroying life' (Heesterman, 1993, p. 34) and about taking care that the body of a sacrificial victim is dismembered in a way that allows for its being re-membered, that is, for keeping its integrity as a whole, and thus for its being re-embodied in a heavenly, ancestral realm (see Malamoud, 1996). Cosmology entails the creation of a new, diversified, but complete whole by splitting up a former, already existing whole into parts. The ritual destruction (killing) of primordial completeness is in the hymn depicted

as the cosmological act which implies the recreation of completeness at another level, in that the limbs of victim are transformed into the members of a socio-cosmic world. Sacrifice as a cosmological act is described as a recursive process, as something that has no cause or agency from without, as is stated at the very end of the hymn: The first laws (*dharma*, pl.) came into existence when the gods 'performed the sacrifice with a sacrifice' (*Ṛgveda*, 10.90.16).

Other cosmological accounts connected to sacrifice draw on the notion of the 'sacrificial wheel', that is, the ritual circulation and transformation of sacrificial offerings from one cosmic realm or sacrificial fire to another and back again. Such movement is described in the so-called five-fire-doctrine in the *Chāndogya-Upaniṣad*, which describes the movement of offerings from the heavenly regions of the gods down to the human sphere of the sacrificing householder. In this connection, sexual intercourse is interpreted as a householder's sacrifice, in which he sacrifices his semen into the sacrificial fire that is his wife's vagina from which it ultimately re-emerges as newly born in the form of a son (Wilden, 2000).

Other texts describe the movement of offerings as a 'turning of the wheel of sacrifice' (*yajñacakra*), as is seen in the *Bhagavadgītā* which explicitly connects this idea to the very concept of creation: 'At that time when Prajāpati created the creatures together with the sacrifice he declared: "Through it you shall prosper, it shall be the cow that yields your desires. Through it you shall nourish the gods and the gods shall nourish you. By mutually nourishing each other, you shall attain the highest good' (3.10–13). The passage stresses the cosmogonic function of sacrifice as an integral part of creation. This function extends to the present, since sacrifice is regarded as mandatory for maintaining the created world as the arena for enacting the reciprocal relationships on which all creatures depend. Sacrifice guarantees the prosperity of those who participate in it through its retributive structure. It is the arena where the separated spheres of gods and men meet, but are also kept apart – otherwise no mutual benefit would be possible. This means that each sphere is maintained through what it is not – the gods through the human beings, men through the gods. Both eat and thus continue living because of what is sacrificed. In consequence, the sacrificed food is circulating through the cosmic regions. This circular movement is described as based on consumption and reproduction. Each product of the activation of an element is itself turned into the cause of the subsequent one; it is consumed or used by the next. This is expressed in the *Bhagavadgītā* as follows: 'Creatures arise from food, food arises from rain, rain arises from sacrifice, sacrifice arises from (ordained) action' (3.15). Creatures arise from food, which means they consume food, which in turn has consumed the rain, etc. The cycle of production is thus also a cycle of consumption. Here again, cosmology is regarded as a recursive movement of causal interdependence that returns back to the very point of departure and thereby interconnects and actually creates the different cosmic realms in the production of new life (see Malinar, 2007b, pp. 84–90).

Emanation and 'Cosmic Body'

The Upaniṣads and the rise of the early philosophical schools are often regarded as a water-shed in the history of ideas because they present the new concept of an 'immortal self' (*ātman*) that cannot be reached through ritual activities (*karman*), but only through knowledge (*jñāna*). Furthermore, it appears in its true form only when it leaves the mortal body (see *Chāndogya-Upaniṣad* 8.7ff.). This idea had repercussions not only for the status of Vedic ritual, but also for the conceptualization of creation and afterlife. Whether we are dealing with a breach with the Vedic tradition or its continuation has been widely debated. In any case, a marked difference can be noticed with regard to the place now accorded to cyclic and organic models in Vedic texts, in that there is now a greater interest in establishing a hierarchy of causes and a vertical structure of cosmology in which each preceding cause supersedes its effects. Creation (*sṛṣṭi*, *sarga*) is now conceptualized as a manifestation of or even descent from 'higher' into 'lower' realms and powers. It has even been suggested that the word '*upaniṣad'* expresses this very idea of 'subordination' (Falk, 1986). Vedic sacrifice and the Vedic gods are now considered parts of the created world. Although the origin of the world is no longer regarded as a result of a primordial sacrifice, Veda-based performance of ritual and social duties is still accorded a central place in the created world and remains the arena of enacting the principle of reciprocity that keeps the world together. Not only cosmological activity, but also worldly activities that result in sustaining law and order (dharma), social relationships and familial continuity are now called *pravṛtti* (Bailey, 1985). When engaging in its opposite, *nivṛtti* (ceasing from worldly activity, resting), an individual travels on a religious pathway that ends in liberation (*mokṣa*).

The development of the cosmological model of emanation is intimately connected to the emergence of the concept of a first and single creative principle in the Upaniṣads. It is regarded as the source and cause (material, instrumental, etc.) of the universe. This highest principle is described as 'true being' (*sat*), 'consciousness' (*cit*), 'unchanging' (*akṣara*), as the 'one' (*eka*) that is and becomes the 'whole' (*sarva*). The terminology for designating this entity is fluid as it is called variously *brahman*, (*mahān*) *ātman* or *puruṣa*. Cosmology is described as a process of diversification and multiplication of the 'One' in the different realms and beings of a hierarchically ordered cosmos. The cosmos is now described as the body of the creative cause and the creator is regarded as embodied in creation. This happens when either the creative power manifests itself in a process of emanation, or a life-giving principle enters previously inanimate elements (Frauwallner, 1926). Both models remain influential in subsequent traditions as well.

In this connection cognitive processes are depicted as incentives of cosmology, as for instance, the emergence of consciousness and self-awareness in a

body. This is the case in *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad* 1.4.1–3 when creation begins at the moment of self-recognition of the creator, a recognition that results first in fear and then in the desire to multiply:

> In the beginning this world was just a single body shaped like a man. He looked around and saw nothing but himself. The first thing he said was 'Here I am' and from that the name 'I' came into being. Therefore, even today when you call someone, he first says: 'It's I' and then states whatever other name he may have. [. . .] That first being became afraid; therefore, one becomes afraid when one is alone. Then he thought to himself: 'Of what shall I be afraid, when there is no one but me?' So his fear left him, for what was he going to be afraid of? One is, after all, afraid of another. He found no pleasure at all; so one finds no pleasure when one is alone. He wanted to have a companion. Now he was as large as a man and a woman in close embrace. So he split his body into two, giving rise to husband and wife. [. . .] He copulated with her, and from their union human beings were born. (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad*, 1.4.1–3; tr. Olivelle)

This account works with different stages of a cognitive process happening in an already extant body that gains fecundity by splitting apart not just into two sexes, but into the two social positions of 'husband' and 'wife', institutions reinforced here through cosmology. This is only one of many texts that draw on the desire to multiply in order to explain why a complete 'One' diversifies into many. Often, a female is made the instrument of a male desire to multiply, expand and reproduce, which points to the construction of gender relations and hierarchies implied in the cosmological models.

In Epic and Purāṇic literature single, highest gods and goddesses are depicted as the highest principle responsible for the creation, sustanence and destruction of the world. In some texts, the beginning of creative activity is also connected to cognitive processes metaphorically described as 'opening the eyes' (*unmeṣa*) of the god or goddess, and the involution of the cosmos is connected to 'closing the eyes' (*nimeṣa*). Often the highest god or goddess draws upon creative powers that take on the work of creation while being only 'supervised' by the deity.

The idea – already expressed in the *puruṣa*-hymn discussed before – that the created world is the body or an embodiment of the cause of creation remains influential in later texts, even if it is no longer explicitly connected to sacrificial dismemberment. Rather, cosmogony becomes the 'prototype of somatogony' (van Buitenen, 1964, p. 108) and is turned into the template for the creation of individual bodies. Examples for this are the cosmic body of the *puruṣa* or so-called *mahā ātman* (mighty Self), both depicted as causes of creation in the Upaniṣads. The appearance of a 'cosmic body' is made into a stage in the

emanation of cosmos, representing the original plenitude and unity of the universe before its manifestation and diversification as the visible world.

In theistic texts the wholeness and totality of the cosmos are described as a manifestation of a cosmic body of the highest god with multiple body parts. It is called *viśvarūpa* and also becomes a topic of iconographical representation (Srinivasan, 1997). In the eleventh chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā* for instance, the cosmological unity of the world is represented as the multiplicity of Lord Kṛṣṇa's form as cosmic sovereign and highest god. His devotee Arjuna describes it as follows: 'I see you with manifold arms, bellies, mouths and eyes, being everywhere in your infinite form. I cannot see your end, middle or your origin, Supreme lord of the Universe (*viśveśvara*), Form universal (*viśvarūpa*)!' (11.16; see Malinar 2007b, pp. 163–72). Since it is Kṛṣṇa's body in which the whole world resides, the god is not only the supreme lord of the universe (*viśveśvara*), but also its universal, encompassing form (*viśvarūpa*). In her comprehensive study of this 'multiplicity convention' as a unique feature of Hindu traditions, Srinivasan (1997) has shown that deities associated with the cosmic creation are already attributed multiple body parts in Vedic texts: 'The entire Brāhmaṇic tradition – Vedas and epic – unites in designating the form of the creator god as a gigantic Male radiating with the total number of bodily parts on this exterior and containing, in his interior, the material forms to inhabit the worlds' (Srinivasan, 1997, pp. 134–5). This is why Hindu theologies, such as those formulated in the *Bhagavadgītā*, can be aptly designated 'cosmological monotheism', which means that the concept of the one and only highest god (or goddess) is combined with a subordination of other, lower gods as parts of the god-created cosmos or the god's creative powers respectively (Malinar, 2007b, pp. 6–9; 237ff.). The manifestation of cosmic totality as a stage in the creation of the world is not confined to (mono) theistic cosmologies. It is also ascribed to impersonal, absolute entities that are regarded as cause of creation.

While the 'cosmic body' contains the totality of all bodies, the individual body is interpreted as a specification and limited manifestation of that totality, which is nevertheless in principle identical with the constituents of the cosmos as a whole. This is sometimes referred to as the identity between macrocosm and microcosm. This relationship between the whole and its parts as being identical, yet (apparently) different is variously interpreted in Hindu philosophies and theologies.

The Sāṃkhya Model of Cosmology

The cosmological model developed in Sāṃkhya philosophy reduces the multitude of beings to a set of twenty-five cosmological principles (*tattva*) which provide the structure and matter of the cosmos (Larson, 1979). Sāṃkhya combines

a cognitive explanation with the holistic idea of the cosmos as being the manifestation of the creative plenitude of the material, self-organizing cause of creation. The creation of the world and individual bodies (*sarga*) is explained as the result of an ontological error or rather of the ignorance of the first of the cosmological principles, the 'immortal consciousness', called *puruṣa* or *jña* (knower), about its true identity: creation starts because the *puruṣa*, although devoid of any activity, mistakes himself as being active and full of creative potential when he becomes connected to the other eternal ontological principle, *prakṛti*, that is self-active nature and material matrix. Both principles are declared to be uncaused and independent of any other being. Once these two principles entertain a connection (*saṃyoga*), *prakṛti* starts producing a body for consciousness. The creation of an individual body is, in many Sāṃkhya texts, blended with the creation of the whole cosmos. The template for the creation and constitution of visible bodies consists in a set of twenty-three non-eternal categories, called *tattvas*, three cognitive faculties, ten senses, five subtle element matrices and five gross elements. Together these *tattvas* form different bodies according to fourteen different species (*jāti*), such as eight classes of gods, one species of humans and five species of animals and plants. The body that serves the purposes of creation best is the human body since the cognitive faculties are most developed (when compared with animals for instance) – a fact that allows us to obtain liberation, which is postulated as one of the reasons for creation. Cosmology is thus explained by drawing on a teleological argument: the created world and the individual bodies exist because they serve a purpose (*artha*) that is the reason for the connection of the two principles. Creation has a double purpose for the *puruṣa*: experience of the world (*darśana*) followed by liberation from it (*kaivalya*).

The first seven of the twenty-three *tattvas* emerge vertically in a sequence of causal production, while the remaining sixteen aggregate horizontally as the visible, individualized body (Malinar, 2003). The process of manifestation of the *tattvas* follows certain principles. The preceding *tattva* is larger in size, more subtle (*sūkṣma*) and more general (*sāmānya*) than the subsequent one. In consequence, the appearance of an individual body is the result of a process of condensation, specification and individualization of the preceding subtler and larger *tattvas*. The process of creation is driven by the causal dynamism of the three creative powers that constitute *prakṛti*, the three so-called *guṇas* (literally 'threads'). They appear in different constellations and aggregations (*saṃghāta*) and are in constant movement and change (*pariṇāma*). Since each body serves the purpose of the embodied consciousness, functionality and instrumentality govern all transactions among the beings in the world. Everything serves a purpose. Accordingly, lending mutual support and subordination in order to achieve a certain goal are typical modes of cosmological, that is purpose-oriented agency. There is no distinction between cosmological and social agency,

as can be seen in the use of the doctrine of the different aggregations of the 'powers of nature' (*guṇas*) in classifications of beings as well as of forms of behaviour, food, etc. This scheme enjoys great popularity and is even met with in daily life contexts.

The whole set of the twenty-five *tattvas* marks an important difference with respect to earlier and alternative models of cosmology: the manifoldness of the created world is explained as a specification of a stable inventory of a finite number of *tattvas*, cosmological principles and basic constituents of all beings. This fundamental identity of constitutive elements explains the characteristic features of the created world, such as purposefulness or the phenomenon of the food-chain (living beings are digestible for each other). Another characteristic feature of Sāṃkhya cosmology is that it is exclusively oriented towards the soteriological concerns of the individual, embodied consciousness. It does not establish a 'world-oriented' referential framework of meaning that is employed for instance in religions, in which the salvation of the world as a whole is a prominent feature.

Cosmology in the Purāṇas

In the textual genre of the Purāṇas (dated from ca. 300 CE) cosmology is a topic any text must cover in order to be recognized as a member of the genre. Generally, Purāṇas are texts that propagate social and ritual norms as well as myths of gods and kings according to a particular devotional tradition. In the Purāṇas as well as in many other religious traditions of Hinduism the twenty-five cosmological principles (*tattva*) of Sāṃkhya philosophy as well as the structure of emanation are used in different theological frameworks. Often, they are expanded or modified by other principles, as for instance in Kashmir Śaivism wherein thirty-six *tattvas* are used for explaining the world as being created and pervaded by the energy of god Śiva. In many Purāṇas the Sāṃkhya scheme is used in more elaborate form as well by embedding it into spatial and temporal frameworks. This resulted in what can be called 'Purāṇic cosmology' which gained a high degree of dissemination and popularity (Biardeau, 1981).

This Purāṇic cosmology includes a cartography of cosmic realms that has become the standard model of cosmography not only in Hindu, but also, with variations, in Buddhist and Jain traditions (Kirfel, 1920). This cosmographical model can be regarded as an elaboration of one of the oldest cosmological models that describes the cosmos as a 'threefold-world' (*triloka*) consisting of heaven, earth and the intermediate space. The mythic imagery connected to this concept already in Vedic literature centres on the question of how the intermediate space was created because only then is there room for living beings. As a consequence, creation is often described as an act of separation (for instance, of

heaven and earth, which where originally united) or of splitting up of a whole. Most influential became the image of the 'cosmic egg' containing the 'golden embryo' (*hiraṇyagarbha*) floating in the ocean, which then split apart. While one half of the egg became the heavenly region, the other the earth, while the space in-between allowed for life. The water was displaced in this process and now encircles both earth and heaven. Conversely, the destruction of the worlds is depicted as a deluge and cosmic night in which the space between heaven and earth is closed. The notion of the 'threefold-world' and the cosmic egg also implies the existence of a world beyond, the non-world (Malamoud, 2005).

While some of this imagery is also used in the Purāṇic cosmologies, other agents are introduced, most importantly a highest god or goddess responsible for the creation, but also salvation of all beings. They reside in their transcendent, paradisiacal realms beyond the cosmos. Reaching them means to have obtained liberation, as is the case when entering Vaikuṇṭha, Viṣṇu`s paradise, or Goloka, Kṛṣṇa`s highest abode. The cosmos as described in the Purāṇas is generally called 'Brahma-World' (*brahmaloka*) or 'Brahma-Egg' (*brahmāṇḍa*), the cosmos created by that god who usually takes on the role of a creator god: the god Brahmā. However, in most texts his creative activity depends on the presence and power of another, higher god. Cosmology starts in the manifestation of the so-called *mahākalpa*, the large cosmic period, which implies the formation of the cosmos in its spatial and temporal dimensions and comprises one day and one night in god Brahmā's existence. The large cosmic period is divided into smaller time units, world-periods (*kalpa*), world-epochs (*manvantara*) and world-ages (*yuga*), which are used to reckon cosmic time and thereby provide the temporal boundaries of a spatially delimited cosmos. The passing of time within the cosmos implies the periodic destruction and recreation (*pratisarga*) of the world.

The created world is usually divided into seven continents (*dvīpa*) of which one is of particular importance: the continent of the 'rose-apple-tree' (*jambudvīpa*). This continent is divided into different 'regions' (*varṣa*) along a north–south axis which is also subject to taxonomy of higher and lower. While the northern, 'higher' regions are inhabited by powerful, often divine beings, the southern, 'lower' end is at the gateway to the under-world with its different hells. The southernmost region of the continent is Bhāratavarṣa, India. Although being the 'lowest' in the cosmic taxonomy, this region is in many respects the most important one, because it is the point of departure for any religious progress. The reason for this is that this region has certain exceptional features that distinguish it from all the other regions. First it is called *karmabhūmī*, the 'land of *karman*'. This means that only here the law of *karman* is valid, that is the retribution of one's activities either by enjoying merits or suffering punishment. All other regions, be they heavens or hells, are *bhogabhūmī*, 'lands of experiencing the consequences of *karman*'. In consequence, one needs to be in this region, in India, in order to improve one's situation and to make progress on the way to

liberation. Secondly, it is only here that the laws of caste and ritual duties (*dharma*) apply and provide the appropriate normative framework for karmic activities, that is, for gaining merit or even liberation. Thirdly, only this region witnesses the sequence of the 'world-ages' (*yuga*) and thus the gradual decay of *dharma*, the socio-cosmic order that structures life in this region. The central role accorded to India introduces a dynamic centre into an otherwise stable formation of the cosmological levels and realms and thus allows for some mobility. The construction of India as an exceptional cosmic region puts a strong emphasis on the conduciveness of this region for religious aspirations. It is construed as the place which offers the best chances to pursue one's religious goals.

Cosmology and Religious Practice

Cosmological explanations and cosmographical maps are also important instruments in religious practice. Sāṃkhya cosmology, with its homologization of individual body and cosmic elements can be considered to be most influential in this respect as well. It has been included in the cosmological models not only of the Purāṇas, but also of many later philosophical and Tantric schools, such as Kashmir Śaivism or Vaiṣṇaiva Pāñcarātra. In all these schools the religious quest is connected to what may be called the 'cosmologization' of the individual body. This means that the visible body that consists of individualized and thus limited cosmic elements (*tattvas*), is gradually 'conquered' by identifying it with the cosmic principles. This 'involution' of the cosmological process is central in Yoga traditions too, such as presented in the *Yogasūtra* of Patañjali and its commentaries. Not only is the success of the practice described in terms of 'victory' or 'conquest' (*jaya*), but also are the different states of meditation (*samādhi*) connected with entering a specific cosmic realm inhabited by deities and all those who have also succeeded in Yoga. Since entering these realms implies gaining control over the power associated with them, this 'conquest' results in the acquisition of supernatural powers, the so-called *siddhis* or *vibhūtis*. These allow the Yogin, for instance, to fly (*ākāśagamana*) or to produce 'artificial bodies' (*nirmāṇakāya*). The acquisition of those powers cannot be avoided, because they are part of the cosmic pathway to liberation, but they should not be used. Otherwise, the Yogin would be prevented from proceeding to the higher stages and eventually from liberation of the immortal self. Being mistaken or forgetful about the position of a realm in the cosmic hierarchy is a danger that awaits a Yogin even at the highest stages of practice. As example may serve the discussion about reaching 'absorption in the cause of creation' (*prakṛtilaya*), which is considered 'like', but not 'true' liberation (Malinar, 2010a). By contrast, the story of the sage Śuka included in the *Mahābhārata* epic (12.309–20) can serve as an example for a successful journey through the realms of the cosmos. When he

finally sets out to leave the world for good, he travels upward through the different cosmic regions, until he arrives at the mountains, the solid markers of the frontiers of the higher realms. Faced with the successful Yogin, the mountains open up and Śuka vanishes in the gap that is again closed behind him (Malinar, 2010b). The connection between stages of meditation and cosmic realms is also prominent in Buddhism (Gethin, 1997).

Another form of 'cosmologization' is taught in the Tantric traditions, which most generally means traditions not based on the Vedas, but a corpus of texts revealed by the deity. Tantric rituals aim at entering the realm of the highest god or goddess, which means to be liberated and/or obtain a state of extraordinary empowerment. Although the different Tantric traditions map their cosmologies differently, certain common features can be pointed out that distinguish them from Pātañjala Yoga. First of all, empowerment, acquiring the abovementioned *siddhis*, is regarded as a religious goal in its own right. This is brought about by both ritual and meditative practices that result in a gradual substitution of the physical body with a divinized body through the application of *mantras* (ritual invocations, here more technically, the presence of divine powers in phonetic form). This is called *nyāsa* which is preceded by the meditative dissolution of the physical body that consists of the five elements (Flood, 2000). This practice is a prominent feature of Tantric traditions and points to the over-all importance of *mantras* and the corresponding 'cosmic diagrams' (*maṇḍala*, *yantra*) that support the ritual by mapping the place and position of the mantras and the deities within the cosmological process (Bühnemann, 2003). The goal is to permanently transform the visible human body into a divine body residing in the corresponding cosmic realms (Sanderson, 1995).

These practical applications of cosmological models reflect some of the most important aspects of cosmologies. On the one hand, they delineate order and stability, establish fixed power-relationships and boundaries and ordain enforcement of those laws and practices considered vital for maintaining the cosmos. On the other hand, they must prevent this closed system from coming to a stand-still, and make room for contingency, individual agency and thus for changing constellations which can only be addressed when these stable boundaries can temporarily be negotiated, crossed or even removed.

Sāṃkhya-Yoga Traditions

Knut A. Jacobsen

Sāṃkhya and Yoga are names of two systems of Hindu religious thought. They are two of the so-called *ṣaḍdarśanas,* the six Hindu philosophical systems, but

both words have a much wider reference. Sāṃkhya and Yoga are not only two of the schools of Hindu philosophy but are fundamental categories of the Hindu traditions. Sāṃkhyaistic concepts and interpretations pervade large parts of Hinduism.[1] They are found in a number of texts of ancient India and dominate several knowledge traditions such as the Indian traditions of medicine of Āyurveda, of interpretations of purity and impurity, classification of living beings, understanding of food and so on, and they are omnipresent in the narrative traditions of the *Mahābhārata* and the Purāṇas. Sāṃkhya ideas are especially important in the mythological descriptions of the creation of the world, classification of beings, and conceptions of divinity and liberation and Sāṃkhya had an enormous influence on the later theological systems both Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava and Śākta. The Sāṃkhya pattern of enumeration of fundamental principles (*tattvas*) is employed in a number of theological traditions, although the traditions have added their own principles above *prakṛti* and *puruṣa* as the ultimate ones. Sāṃkhya categories are used to understand the natural and the social world in Dharmaśāstras such as the *Manusmṛti* and are fundamental in the social and religious teaching of the *Bhagavadgītā*. The term Yoga has an even wider application than Sāṃkhya because it is not only the name of a system of religious thought and a method of classifying the world, but is one of the main forms of spiritual practice in Hinduism. There are many traditions of yoga in Hinduism, and the system of religious thought called Yoga is only one of these. A majority of the yoga traditions do nevertheless consider the *Yogasūtra,* the foundation text of the Yoga system of religious thought, as the basis of their yoga.

The Hindu systems of religious thought (*darśanas*) are defined by having one foundation text (usually a *sūtra* text, in the case of Sāṃkhya, a *kārikā*)[2] and a tradition of commentaries on these texts that explain and interpret the foundation texts, and further sub-commentaries that expand on the commentaries. Sāṃkhya as a system of religious thought is identified with the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* of Īśvarakṛṣṇa (350–400 CE) and the tradition of Sanskrit commentaries on this text. The Yoga system of religious thought is identified with the *Yogasūtra* that was composed and compiled and provided with the commentary known as the *Vyāsabhāṣya* around 350–400 CE and the tradition of Sanskrit commentaries on these texts. Each system is also associated with a founder. Kapila is considered the founder of Sāṃkhya;[3] Patañjali is considered the author of the *Yogasūtra,* and therefore, by many, also the founder of Yoga. However, the word *anuśāsana* in *Yogasūtra* 1.1 (*atha yogānuśāsanam*) is interpreted as intended to convey that the teaching of Yoga that is presented is not a new knowledge tradition created by the composer of the *Yogasūtra* but is based on an ancient transmission. It claims that *Yogasūtra* is not the first presentation but is a restatement of an earlier yoga of which often in Sāṃkhya-Yoga Hiraṇyagarbha is considered the founder. There is neither a reliable description of a continuous Sāṃkhya tradition from Kapila to Īśvarakṛṣṇa and to contemporary India nor a continuous tradition of

spiritual practice of Yoga from Hiraṇygarbha to Patañjali and to our times. Sāṃkhya and Yoga were not institutionalized in the same way as Buddhism and Jainism were, and it is not always clear whom the Sāṃkhyans and the Pātañjala yogins were and what kind of religious practice they actually engaged in. Many of the authors of the Sanskrit commentaries on the Sāṃkhya and Yoga texts such as Vācaspatimiśra, whose commentaries *Tattvakaumudī* (on *Sāṃkhyakārikā*) and *Tattvavaiśāradī* (on *Yogasūtra* and *Vyāsabhāṣya*) have been fundamental in the academic teaching and understanding of Sāṃkhya and Yoga, were probably themselves not devoted to these systems of religious thought. The texts might have been produced for educational purposes. The traditions of Sāṃkhya and Yoga might have had very few practitioners, and they might even have died out and been revived several times in Indian history.

Sāṃkhya, Yoga and Sāṃkhya-Yoga

The words Sāṃkhya and Yoga are often joined as Sāṃkhya-Yoga. The term Sāṃkhya-Yoga may have two meanings. First, the six systems of religious thought, the *ṣaḍdarśanas*, were often thought of as forming three pairs because of their similarities, and Sāṃkhya and Yoga as a pair were termed Sāṃkhya-Yoga. Sāṃkhya-Yoga might therefore refer to the Sāṃkhya and Yoga systems of religious thought as a unity, in a similar way that the term Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika is used to refer to the Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika systems. Secondly, Sāṃkhya-Yoga might also refer to the tradition of yoga usually just referred to as Yoga, that is, Pātañjala Yoga, which is the yoga tradition of the *Yogasūtra* and its fundamental commentary *Vyāsabhāṣya* (*Yogabhāṣya*) and the philosophical traditions of commentaries on these texts.[4] There are several reasons this tradition of Yoga is referred to as Sāṃkhya-Yoga. First, in order to distinguish it from the many other traditions of yoga, and secondly, to emphasize that the yoga tradition of the *Yogasūtra* and the *Vyāsabhāṣya* is a school of Sāṃkhya philosophy. There are several schools of Sāṃkhya philosophy in the history of religions in India. One of these is the system of religious thought called Sāṃkhya, that is, the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* and the tradition of commentaries on this text. A second is the system of religious thought called Yoga. That Yoga is a school of Sāṃkhya often goes unrecognized and needs to be stressed. The author of the *Vyāsabhāṣya* (*Yogabhāṣya*) commentary on *Yogasūtra* clearly considered the text and his commentary as works of Sāṃkhya philosophy. One of the titles of *Vyāsabhāṣya* is *Sāṃkhyapravacana*, 'a treatise of Sāṃkhya'. Most probably the author was also a practitioner of Sāṃkhya. The text as a whole (Sūtra and Bhāṣya) was known as *Yogaśāstra,* and it was the later interpreters that made a distinction between the *Yogasūtra* and *Vyāsabhāṣya*. The words *Yogasūtra* and *Vyāsabhāṣya* are not found in the text and were imposed later (Bronkhorst, 2010). Most probably it was the

author of the *Vyāsabhāṣya* who also collected the *sūtras* in the *Yogasūtra* (Bronkhorst, 2010; Larson, 2008). This means that the *Yogaśāstra/Sāṃkhyapravacana* is the longest and most important ancient Sāṃkhya text written by a practitioner of Sāṃkhya/Sāṃkhya-Yoga. Many of the individual *sūtras* are perhaps older than the *Yogasūtra* and the author most likely brought together *sūtras* belonging to several yoga traditions in addition to those he composed himself. However, he brought them together in a Sāṃkhya framework.

That there is a close relationship between Sāṃkhya and Yoga is frequently stated in the *Mahābhārata,* such as in 12.304.2: 'There is no knowledge comparable to Sāṃkhya, there is no power comparable to Yoga' (*nāsti sāṃkhyasamaṃ jñānaṃ nāsti yogasamaṃ balam*). But the words *sāṃkhya* and *yoga* are also much older than the schools of religious thought with these names, and both words have a much wider meaning and more complex history than the Sāṃkhya and Yoga systems of philosophy. In the early sources *sāṃkhya* meant 'enumeration' and 'reasoning' and referred to the method of reasoning; *yoga* meant the method of spiritual discipline (Edgerton, 1924). Because of the uncertainty of dating the individual verses in the *Mahābhārata,* it is not clear whether the verses refer to the Sāṃkhya and Yoga *darśanas* or to two methods of attaining *mokṣa* (as in the *Bhagavadgītā*). However, Sāṃkhya and Yoga *darśanas* are nevertheless closely related historically. They are really two interpretations of Sāṃkhya philosophy. Larson (2008) has suggested that the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* represents the Sāṃkhya tradition of the Sāṃkhya teacher Vārṣagaṇya and the *Yogasūtra* with the *Sāṃkhyapravacana* the Sāṃkhya tradition of the teacher Vindhyavāsin.[5] A difference between Classical Sāṃkhya and Sāṃkhya-Yoga is that a good deal of the vocabulary used in *Yogasūtra* and *Vyāsabhāṣya* is different from *Sāṃkhyakārikā.* This vocabulary is also found in Buddhist texts and might have been common to several philosophies of meditation in ancient India, or it may point more directly to a Buddhist influence on *Yogasūtra* and *Vyāsabhāṣya*. The Buddhist vocabulary of the *Yogasūtra* and the *Sāṃkhyapravacana* reflects perhaps that Vindhyavāsin was involved in a vigorous exchange with the Buddhist Vasubandhu, the author of the *Abhidharmakośa* (Larson and Bhattacarya, 2008). For an understanding of the Buddhist influence on Yoga, more work needs to be done on the interaction in early Indian history of religious ideas and the institutions of those traditions that we today call Hindu and Buddhist.[6]

Both Sāṃkhya and Yoga systems of religious thought are *mokṣaśāstras*, systems of salvific liberation (seeking release from *saṃsāra*), but they have a different history. Sāṃkhya is a system of interpretation, primarily a theory about the world. Yoga is both a theory and a practice. However, Yoga as a practice did also become joined in the history of religions in India with a number of theories of the world that were different from Sāṃkhya. Yoga became one of the main forms of spiritual practice, and although its ultimate origin is unclear it was joined with a great variety of theologies and philosophies.

Yoga has shown to be adoptable to a number of different traditions. The eight limbs of yoga can be interpreted as a way to liberation (*mokṣa*) or just as a preparation for the meditation on the divine, as in the example of the *Kapilagītā* (*Kapilopadeśa*) of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 3.22–33 in which the eight limbs of yoga are a preparation for meditation on the divine form of Kṛṣṇa. A number of yoga systems have developed, one of the largest family of traditions being that of Haṭhayoga traditions, which were built around body postures (*āsanas*) and breathing exercises (*prāṇāyāma*). In the last hundred years', yoga as a practice of bodily postures and breathing techniques has increasingly developed into a plurality of yoga traditions associated with physical health and reduction of mental stress. In Sāṃkhya-Yoga *āsana* means just the ability 'to remain comfortably in the same position for a long period in a relaxed fashion' (Larson, 2008, p. 118). Modern yoga has become an extraordinary global success, but, as has been well documented in a number of excellent studies, most modern yoga is to a large degree just gymnastics, that is, physical exercise systems that have blended traditions of gymnastics from several cultures (European and Indian) which then have been dressed in an Indian yogic garb (Alter, 2004; Singleton, 2010; Sjoman, 1999). Advaita Vedānta also became the philosophical foundation of many yoga traditions. Many of these yoga traditions have a very weak or no connection to Sāṃkhya-Yoga, or are opposed to Sāṃkhya-Yoga, but most of them nevertheless claim to be based on Patañjali's *Yogasūtra*. *Yogasūtra* has become a sort of foundation text that most yoga systems claim to build on whatever the philosophy they profess and type of yoga they practise. However there are only minor differences between the Sāṃkhya and Yoga systems of religious thought: the Yoga *darśana* of the *Yogasūtra is* Sāṃkhya-Yoga. With the current global success of a plurality of yoga traditions and teachers, the fact that Yoga is Sāṃkhya-Yoga tends to be forgotten or denied, as contemporary yoga gurus and disciples often are committed to other traditions of religious thought.

There are only minor differences between the Sāṃkhya and Yoga. They are based on the same philosophical foundation: the same three means of knowledge (*pramāṇas*): perception, inference and authoritative testimony; the same number of fundamental principles (twenty-five *tattvas*); the same doctrine of two ultimate principles (*puruṣa* and *prakṛti*); and the same salvific goal of the realization of *puruṣa* as separate from *prakṛti*. Both Sāṃkhya and Yoga are *mokṣaśāstras*; the purpose of the teaching of Sāṃkhya and Yoga is the attainment of liberation, *mokṣa*, in Sāṃkhya-Yoga called *kaivalya*. *Kaivalya* means the realization of *puruṣa,* the principle of consciousness, as independent from mind and body, as different from *prakṛti*. Common to a large section of Hindu religious thought is the idea that the attainment of knowledge, *vidyā* or *jñāna*, causes the destruction of karma, the end of rebirth and attainment of salvific liberation, *mokṣa*. The purpose of the practice of Sāṃkhya-Yoga is to remove the *avidyā*,

which means the realization of the difference between *buddhi* (the intellect, the part of *prakṛti* that is most similar to *puruṣa*) and *puruṣa* by means of 'the cessation of the functioning of ordinary awareness' (*cittavṛttinirodhaḥ*). The goal of Sāṃkhya-Yoga is realized through practice (*abhyāsa*) and detachment (*vairāgya*) that lead to concentration (*samādhi*). Detachment means withdrawal of the senses and practice means the application of effort for a long time. *Samādhi* are of several kinds, but the goal is attainment of the altered state of awareness called *asamprājñāta samādhi*, content-less concentration which leads to *kaivalya. Kaivalya*, the salvific goal, means isolation.

One difference between Classical Sāṃkhya (Sāṃkhya as presented in the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* tradition) and Sāṃkhya-Yoga is that in Sāṃkhya-Yoga devotion to *īśvara* (*īśvarapraṇidhāna*) is recommended as a yoga practice. But *īśvara* is not a separate principle in addition to the twenty-five *tattvas* according to Sāṃkhya-Yoga; *īśvara* according to Sāṃkhya-Yoga does not constitute an additional principle (as some scholars on Hinduism mistakenly have stated). *Īśvara* is neither a creator god nor a saviour god. *Īśvara* is only a special *puruṣa* which has never been associated with *prakṛti*.

Plurality of Sāṃkhya and Yoga Traditions

Sāṃkhya and Yoga are just two different interpretations of Sāṃkhya. Many researchers have argued that before these distinct Sāṃkhya schools developed there were probably many Sāṃkhya centres where more or less parallel doctrines developed (van Buitenen, 1957, pp. 101–2; Larson, 1979, p. 95). In addition, after the development of the distinct schools of Sāṃkhya philosophy, non-philosophical Sāṃkhya continued to a large degree a life of its own little influenced by the attempts of systematic thinkers to create coherent systems out of the non-systematized Sāṃkhya categories (Bronkhorst, 2006, p. 289). In the philosophical texts that criticize Sāṃkhya, ideas are encountered that are not found among any of the surviving Sāṃkhya schools or texts such as the belief that substances were a collection of qualities or that creation meant a division in *pradhāna* (*prakṛti*) (Bronkhorst, 2006, 2007). This might point both to the plurality of Sāṃkhya traditions and to the fact that commentaries belonging to other schools sometimes misunderstood or misrepresented the Sāṃkhya teaching. The term Sāṃkhya now most often refers to the Sāṃkhya tradition of *Sāṃkhyakārikā* and the tradition of philosophical commentaries on that text. However, there continued to be several different traditions of Sāṃkhya after the *Sāṃkhyakārikā*. In addition to the tradition the Sāṃkhya of *Sāṃkhyakārikā*, and the Sāṃkhya-Yoga tradition of *Yogasūtra* and *Vyāsabhāṣya*, there is the system of religious thought of the *Kapilagītā* of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, which is also a Sāṃkhya tradition promoted by a figure called Kapila. The *Kapilagītā* tradition is theistic;

prakṛti is a power of Viṣṇu; Time (*kāla*) is a separate principle, but in the Upaniṣads and in the *Mahābhārata*, including the *Bhagavadgītā*, the Sāṃkhya terms and ideas also often operate in a theistic environment. In the *Kapilāsurisaṃvāda* found in some manuscripts of the southern recension of the *Mahābhārata* is found a Sāṃkhya teaching related to other Sāṃkhya texts of the *Mahābhārata*, but with some differences from the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* (Jacobsen, 2008, see pp. 82–132 for the text and translation of the *Kapilāsurisaṃvāda*). In the *Kapilāsurisaṃvāda* sometimes more than twenty-five principles (*tattvas*) are listed, *buddhi* is sometimes called the second *puruṣa* and *ahaṃkāra* the third *puruṣa*; the terms *buddha*, *budhyamāna* and *apratibuddha* are used as technical terms, and several issues such as *karmayonis,* which are not mentioned in *Sāṃkhyakārikā,* are taken up for discussion and the concept of *tanmātra* is not used. It confirms that Sāṃkhya always was a pluralistic phenomenon in India (Jacobsen, 2008, pp. 78–9). These differences show that there were many schools or traditions of Sāṃkhya also after the *Sāṃkhyakārikā*. It is usually accepted that openness to the greatest possible plurality is the best approach in the investigation of the earliest history of Sāṃkhya, but this openness to plurality of traditions might be a good attitude also for understanding the later history of Sāṃkhya and the contemporary situation as well. Larson writes about the earliest sources that 'in some contexts the Sāṃkhya methodology implies a monistic perspective, in others a theistic or dualist perspective' (Larson, 1987, p. 6). This certainly seems to be the case in later sources such as in the Purāṇas, Māhātmyas and other texts. I want to suggest that also in the later contexts the Sāṃkhya methodology implies monistic, theistic and dualist perspectives. Although classical Sāṃkhya is a dualist system, even after the influential *Sāṃkhyakārikā*, it is found the lengthy presentation of theistic Sāṃkhya in the *Kapilagītā* that blends Sāṃkhya and Yoga with the theology of Kṛṣṇa. In the Upaniṣads are also found theistic Sāṃkhya, and these theistic Sāṃkhya traditions seem to have flourished unbridled by the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* tradition. Other Purāṇas and texts also present Sāṃkhya ideas within different theological frameworks. Clearly, these Sāṃkhyans were not all subservient to the Sāṃkhya of the *Sāṃkhyakārikā*.

This plurality of Sāṃkhya traditions is also reflected in the number of Kapilas mentioned in Hindu texts. Kapila has been associated with different religious traditions and movements in India, but several of these are called Sāṃkhya. More than one Sāṃkhya system is associated with a Kapila. It is quite remarkable that, despite the number of Kapilas mentioned in the Hindu texts and traditions, who in some cases can be easily distinguished because different parents are mentioned in texts, researchers often assume that every mention of the name Kapila is to the same person (for a critical study of the textual references to Kapila, see Jacobsen, 2008).

Even if the terms Sāṃkhya *darśana* and Yoga *darśana* refer to two interpretations of the Sāṃkhya teaching, the terms have very different histories. While

there always seems to have been a plurality of Sāṃkhya traditions, the plurality is perhaps even greater in the case of yoga traditions. Different yoga traditions follow a variety of philosophies. Yoga as a *darśana* was invented by a Sāṃkhya teacher, but yoga has a prehistory different from Sāṃkhya and a history that to a large degree also has been independent from it.

Living Sāṃkhya-Yoga

Philosophies of salvific liberation (*mokṣa*), renunciation and monastic organizations are closely related in Hinduism. Indian philosophy is a theoretical and historical subject taught at the universities in India and is explained in numerous scholarly books, but attainment of the salvific goal of the systems is not the concern in these academic contexts. There are, however, several aspects to Hindu systems of religious thought in contemporary India, and some of the systems of religious thought are also part of a living religious practice. That there is no reliable description of a continuous Sāṃkhya tradition as a spiritual practice in Indian history or of a continuous Sāṃkhya-Yoga tradition probably means that there were no centralized monastic institutions. It probably also means that the practitioners of Sāṃkhya and Sāṃkhya-Yoga always were quite few. Sāṃkhya traditions have perhaps been revived several times in Indian history. One of these revivals was in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Bengal by Hariharānanda Āraṇya (1869–1947) and the tradition of Kāpil Maṭh.[7] Kāpil Maṭh is one of a few institutionalized living Sāṃkhya-Yoga tradition and because of Hariharānanda Āraṇya's ascetic lifestyle and great skills in Sanskrit and Sāṃkhya-Yoga, the most important one. The Sāṃkhya-Yoga of Kāpil Maṭh might not be the first revival of Sāṃkhya. Since the Yoga system of religious thought originated as a school of Sāṃkhya philosophy, the main significance of the Kāpil Maṭh is that it preserves the tradition of the 'original Yoga'. It is notable that in the yoga traditions invented in the twentieth century and the global yoga movements there is usually little or no recognition that Sāṃkhya-Yoga is the 'original' yoga.

Kāpil Maṭh was founded by Hariharānanda Āraṇya who started a small Sāṃkhya-Yoga renaissance in Bengal (Jacobsen, 2005). Āraṇya was from Kolkata (Calcutta), and after a period of university studies, in which he, among other subjects, studied Sanskrit, he was initiated by a guru, took *saṃnyāsin* vows (became an ascetic) and devoted the rest of his life to the practice of Sāṃkhya-Yoga. He spent six years in seclusion in the caves of Barabar Hills in Bihar, but did yoga also at several other places before he entered the Kāpil cave. He visited a number of places in North India and in the Himalayas. A secluded and ascetic lifestyle and the practice of yoga characterized his life, but he also wrote a number of books on Sāṃkhya and Yoga in Sanskrit and Bengali. His successor

Swami Dharmamegha Āraṇya (1892–1985) did not himself write scholarly commentaries in Sanskrit and Bengali on the Sāṃkhya-Yoga Sanskrit texts as had Hariharānanda Āraṇya, but he continued to disseminate the philosophy of his guru to the disciples of the Maṭh in articles, letters and sermons (in Bengali) and also initiated new disciples.

Hariharānanda Āraṇya's guru was Swami Trilokī Āraṇya. In a poem called 'Gurunamaskāra va utsarga' printed in the dedication to a book in Bengali published in 1902 Āraṇya described his lineage of teachers, his *guruparamparā,* and he mentioned specifically that Trilokī Āraṇya became famous for his supersensory knowledge, that Trilokī lay on the ground meditating while wild creatures went around him and that he wandered not lifting his arm even to feed himself. Trilokī Āraṇya's teacher was Triputi Āraṇya whose teacher Paraṃsvabhāraṇya made the light of Sāṃkhya-yoga burn in his disciple, Āraṇya wrote. This Sāṃkhya-yoga practice Paraṃsvabhāraṇya had learned from his guru Śrī Bhāsvataprajña, Hariharānanda Āraṇya states. Hariharānanada does not anywhere in his many texts elaborate further on this *guruparamparā*, so that is all that is known. However, this *guruparamparā* shows that there was a living tradition of Sāṃkhya-Yoga ascetics in India at the time and that Hariharānanda encountered an ascetic belonging to this tradition who initiated him as his disciple. According to the tradition of the Maṭh, Hariharānanda spent only one day with Swami Trilokī Āraṇya.

Several of the twentieth-century Indian Sāṃkhya-Yoga scholars were disciples of this maṭh and Kāpil Maṭh is an important lineage in the academic study of Sāṃkhya-Yoga. The renowned Sāṃkhya-Yoga scholar Ram Shankar Bhattacharya (1927–1996) of Varanasi was initiated in the Kāpil Maṭh tradition by Swāmi Dharmamegha Āraṇya, whom he considered his guru. In addition to his numerous publications in Sanskrit, Hindi and English, Bhattacharya was also the co-editor with Gerald James Larson of the Sāṃkhya and Yoga volumes of the Encyclopedia of Indian philosophy series.[8] Larson and Bhattacharya cooperated for several decades.[9] Other academicians that have contributed to Sāṃkhya-Yoga scholarship who were disciples or associates of the Maṭh included the philosopher Surama Dasgupta, who was a student of the famous historian of Indian philosophy Surendranath Dasgupta and became his second wife in 1945 (Dasgupta, 1961);[10] Anima Sen Gupta, formerly at Patna University, well-known author of a number of academic studies of Sāṃkhya-Yoga and Indian philosophy (Gupta, 1982, 1986), Deepti Dutta (Dutta, 2001), Jajneshwar Ghosh (Ghosh, 1977) and others. A significant part of the scholarship on Sāṃkhya-Yoga in the twentieth century has in fact been produced by disciples and scholars associated with the Kāpil Maṭh. There is therefore a connection between Sāṃkhya-Yoga as a contemporary practice and Sāṃkhya-Yoga scholarship that is not always recognized or known.[11]

A unique feature of the Kāpil Maṭh (besides being a living Sāṃkhya-Yoga tradition in India) is that its guru lives permanently locked up in an artificial

cave. In the Kāpil Maṭh, the cave is considered an ultimate means for the practice (*abhyāsa*) of detachment (*vairāgya*) and withdrawal of the senses. It also mirrors the isolation of *puruṣa* in the liberated state. The first building of the *maṭh* was this cave, *Kāpil guha*, built by a volunteer, and Hariharānanda Āraṇya spent the last twenty-one years of his life (from 1926–1947) in it. In Kapiladhārā, a *maṭh* in Bihar, is also found a Kāpil *guha* (see Jacobsen, 2008), but this type of cave dwelling was probably not a characteristic mark of the ancient Sāṃkhya-Yogins.

In India in the twentieth century, there were also other teachers and traditions asserting a Sāmkhya philosophy, most famous among these was probably that of Anirvan (see Anirvan, 1983; Jacobsen, 2005). In India today are also found monasteries that worship Kapila as the teacher of the Sāṃkhya philosophy of the Kapilagītā of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* and follow this teaching of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*. There are a number of pilgrimage places associated with Kapila, both Kapila of the systematic philosophy of the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* and the non-systematic Sāṃkhya of the *Mahābhārata* and the Purāṇas, and of the Kapila who taught the Sāṃkhya of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* (see Jacobsen, 2008 for a description and analysis of these places of pilgrimage). The plurality of Sāṃkhya traditions, both in history and in the living Hindu tradition, is much larger than what is presented as Sāṃkhya in much of the academic literature on Sāṃkhya *darśana*.

Sanskrit Epics: The Rāmāyaṇa, Mahābhārata and Harivaṃśa

Simon Brodbeck

> *The two Sanskrit epics announce the end of what can be called the Vedic religion and in a way build, though they are mainly narrative poems, the ideological base of classical Brahmanism and of what will be its more widely spread form: the Hindu* bhakti *as the religion of devotion.*
>
> (*Biardeau, 1997, p. 73*)

Within the Hindu tradition, the *Rāmāyaṇa* is usually known as *kāvya* (poetry) – or, to be precise, *ādikāvya* (the first work of poetry) – and the *Mahābhārata* as *itihāsa* (history). According to David Shulman (1991), these terms correlate here with different kinds of poetics – respectively, 'the poetics of perfection' and 'the poetics of dilemma' – and with different traditions of delivery, *kāvya* being sung and *itihāsa* spoken (though one wonders about the *gītās*).

The old stories (*purāṇa*) contained in these texts are extremely well known and have been widely re-presented in later texts in Sanskrit and in other

languages and formats, but in this essay I will discuss only those two Sanskrit texts, *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*, if one includes within '*Mahābhārata*' the *Harivaṃśa*; or those three, if one doesn't. The last several books (*upaparvans*) of the one hundred that are said to make up the *Mahābhārata* are found in the *Harivaṃśa*; the allegedly later division of the *Mahābhārata* into eighteen larger books (*parvans*) places the *Harivaṃśa* outside the eighteen, but as nonetheless a constituent part of a larger whole that includes them (*Mahābhārata* 1.2:69–71 and 233–4).

These texts, which we shall take as our own, as world literature, tell of certain family lines – in the *Rāmāyaṇa* the descendants of Ikṣvāku, in the *Mahābhārata* the descendants of Bharata, and in the *Harivaṃśa* the descendants of Yadu – and each text contains genealogical details as well as stories about the ancestors. But each text also focuses on a particular recent generation: in the *Rāmāyaṇa* the generation of Rāma Dāśaratha and his brothers, and in the *Mahābhārata* and *Harivaṃśa* the generation of the Pāṇḍava brothers and the contemporary generation of Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva and his brother.

Soteriological Context

The longitudinal lineal specificity of these texts suggests what (for want of a better term) might be called ancestor worship; and within them we find details of a soteriology based upon having patrilineal descendants and receiving regular memorial-cum-alimentary offerings from them, enabling continued postmortem existence in a *pitṛloka* (ancestral heaven). Performing the *śrāddha* ritual whereby the ancestors are fed, and producing children who will thereafter continue the offerings (and include oneself as an ancestor), is presented as a primary religious duty. This is so also outside these texts, in India and elsewhere, in those days and in others, if we imagine inclusive senses of 'religious' and of '*śrāddha*'.

The urgent need to be remembered after death is clear in the ritual system that the Vedic texts describe: the standard benefits said to result from ritual activity, apart from health and long life, are descendants and fame – where fame might result in memorial afterlife in Indraloka, the heroes' heaven, even for those who die childless. Indeed, in many reported cases in recent times, women unfortunate enough to die childless have made themselves famous (thus ensuring their own ongoing memorial sustenance) from beyond the grave by allegedly making mischief in the world of the living.

In the *Mahābhārata* on two occasions we find scenes in which ancestors, endangered by the celibacy or childlessness of their crucial descendant, hang upside-down in a hole in the ground, and plead with their descendant to save them by having children. Falling out of heaven is a common image in the text. And here there is the suspicion that memorial salvation is not final; how long,

after all, can one expect to be remembered in the land of the living after one is dead? The heroes of the old Sanskrit texts are still doing quite well, but memorial heaven would seem to be a temporary place of residence in most cases; and we find the notion that when one's heavenly term expires, one returns to a new life on earth. As Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna Pāṇḍava in chapter 9 of the *Bhagavadgītā* (the most famous section of the *Mahābhārata*):

> Those who know the three Vedas and drink *soma* to purify their sins yearn for the path to heaven and try to get to me by means of sacrifice. They reach the holy world of Indra and enjoy the celestial pleasures of the gods in heaven; but having enjoyed the vast world of heaven, they come back to the world of mortals when their merit runs out. So, by following the injunctions of the three Vedas with a desire for pleasures, they get to travel to and fro. (*Mahābhārata* 6.31:20–1, trans. Cherniak, 2008, pp. 237–9)[12]

Accordingly, a separate soteriological tradition is evident in old Sanskrit texts, whereby one travels not the path of the fathers but the path of the gods, attaining a state of *mokṣa* (freedom, release) and never needing to take birth again. Attainment of this goal is said to be connected with the saving knowledge of the true basis of selfhood, the *ātman* – knowledge that was readily associated with unconventional lifestyles. From the perspective of this knowledge, as one young man tells his father, *na māṃ tārayati prajā* (*Mahābhārata* 12.169:34) – 'offspring will not save me' (trans. Wynne, 2009, p. 31) and/or 'I do not require a son for rescuing me' (trans. Ganguli, 1993, p. 8).

This perspective is also well represented in literature beyond the Sanskrit tradition – in the Buddhist tradition with the additional deconstruction of the *ātman*. But in its raw form it is prejudicial to the social and ancestral demand, and so we see accommodations between the *mokṣa* perspective and the ancestral tradition: the famous Dharmaśāstric scheme of the four successive *āśramas* (studenthood, householdership, retirement and wandering mendicancy) sets up the quest for *mokṣa* as something one might reasonably pursue after one's ancestral debt has already been paid; and the philosophy expounded by Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhagavadgītā* suggests that if one were to do one's social and generative duties in a spirit of non-attachment and perfect *bhakti*, then one might make progress towards the goal of *mokṣa* without making any visible alterations to one's lifestyle. Nonetheless, although it is explored at length in the *Mahābhārata*, the tension between these two soteriological paradigms – salvation through living memory and salvation through knowledge – is never fully resolved, and it forms an important background for the understanding of our texts as well as of Hinduism (and indeed life) as a whole.

Also critical is the dualism of the gods and their rivals (*asuras*, demons of various kinds). Their superhuman struggle against each other is said to be the

origin of the known cosmos (as for example in the 'Churning of the Ocean' story of *Mahābhārata* 1.15–17) and the essence of its ongoing constitution. All of our texts tell of deeds performed by gods on earth: gods born in the human realm, by higher decree, in order to cause the death of demons who, having taken refuge on earth, are causing disruption and grief. The subject of this grief is presented as female (even as the very Earth herself), and the rescuers male; and a crucial aspect of the drama in its most protracted tellings is that the rescuers must be operatively ignorant of their higher identity as gods.

Three Narrative Summaries

1. The *Rāmāyaṇa*, which begins with a eulogy of Rāma and an account of its own composition by the sage Vālmīki, tells, in supreme and terrible fashion, in seven books (*kāṇḍas*), the story of King Daśaratha of Ayodhyā, descendant of Ikṣvāku, and his sons. There are four sons from his various wives, and Daśaratha intends to install Rāma, the eldest, as his successor; but his junior wife Kaikeyī persuades him to install her son Bharata instead, and to exile the brilliant Rāma from the kingdom for fourteen years. Bharata is appalled by his mother's machinations and refuses to accept the kingship, but nonetheless Rāma – who is Lord Viṣṇu but, being also human, starts out not knowing this – goes off to the woods in obedience to his father's word, accompanied by his brother Lakṣmaṇa and his wife Sītā, daughter of King Janaka of Mithilā.

In exile Rāma kills various monsters, but occasions the enmity of Rāvaṇa, a powerful ten-headed demon king. Rāvaṇa thinks himself invulnerable on account of having received a boon to the effect that no *gandharva*, *yakṣa*, god, Dānava or *rākṣasa* will be able to kill him (*Rāmāyaṇa* 1.14:13); and he cunningly abducts Sītā and takes her to Laṅkā. Sītā holds out against Rāvaṇa's sexual advances – he cannot rape her because he has previously been cursed that his skull will instantly break into seven pieces should he do such a thing (*Rāmāyaṇa* 7.26:43–4) – and Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa forge an alliance with a community of forest-dwellers (*vānaras*, usually translated 'monkeys'), who help them to locate Sītā and then to mount a successful military campaign against Rāvaṇa and his people. After the battle Rāma tells Sītā that he only rescued her in order to restore his own honour, and that he cannot take her back because she will be suspected of being soiled goods. But she proves her innocence to Rāma by means of an ordeal by fire, and Brahmā tells Rāma he is actually Lord Viṣṇu, and so he takes her back, leaves Rāvaṇa's virtuous brother Vibhīṣaṇa as the king of Laṅkā, and, the term of his long exile over, returns to Ayodhyā and becomes the best king ever.

In the course of time, however, Rāma's reputation becomes sullied by his having taken Sītā back after she had been Rāvaṇa's captive; and so he has

Lakṣmaṇa take her and abandon her in the provinces. Sītā gives birth to Rāma's sons at Vālmīki's *āśrama*, and when they grow up Vālmīki teaches them Rāma's story and then arranges for them to tell it to Rāma at Rāma's ceremonial horse sacrifice (this is the telling we have been hearing all along); and so Rāma comes to accept them as his sons. Attempts to prove Sītā's innocence to the citizens are, however, unsuccessful; rather than submit to another ordeal, Sītā calls upon the earth to swallow her up. Rāma lives out the rest of his days without her, before committing suicide, with his brothers and all the citizens of Ayodhyā, in the River Sarayū. His sons settle elsewhere.

2. The *Mahābhārata*, in similar fashion, presents its central tale as told some time after the events it describes. The setting is King Janamejaya of Hāstinapura's *sarpasatra* (snake session), a massacre perpetrated against the 'snakes' in revenge for the assassination of Janamejaya's father Parikṣit. During the proceedings (which eventually result in Janamejaya's ceasefire and a peace treaty agreed by the surviving snakes) Janamejaya is told the story of his ancestors, the Bhāratas, and most especially the Pāṇḍavas (Yudhiṣṭhira was king before Parikṣit), by Vaiśaṃpāyana, a pupil of Vyāsa, the sage who put the story together – and who is also a genetic ancestor of the latter-day kings of Hāstinapura since, according to his story, he played the role of sperm donor to the widowed queens after King Vicitravīrya died childless.

Yudhiṣṭhira, the eldest of the five Pāṇḍava brothers (who are all partial incarnations of, and fathered by, gods), was the patrilineal rival of his cousin Duryodhana for the Bhārata throne. Duryodhana's attempts to assassinate the young Pāṇḍavas failed, and after the Pāṇḍavas had gained powerful allies through their joint marriage to Draupadī of Pāñcāla, Duryodhana's father the blind King Dhṛtarāṣṭra, in an attempt to solve the problem of succession, divided the ancestral realm in two. But both sets of cousins were ambitious, and Yudhiṣṭhira performed the *rājasūya* rite of royal assertion, and then he accepted an invitation to a dicing match in Hāstinapura at which Draupadī was molested, and the Pāṇḍavas lost their kingdom there and were exiled for thirteen years, during which they travelled, listened to many stories (including an eighteen-chapter version of the story of Rāma Dāśaratha),[13] and acquired special weapons for later use.

When the exile was over, Duryodhana refused to return half of the kingdom to the Pāṇḍavas, and despite various attempts to negotiate a settlement both sides prepared for war, drawing allies from the length and breadth of the land. The war was fought at Kurukṣetra for eighteen days, as we hear narrated to Dhṛtarāṣṭra by Saṃjaya, his personal assistant; almost everyone was killed, but the Pāṇḍavas eventually prevailed on account of the often underhand tactics urged upon them by their cousin and advisor Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva, who served as Arjuna Pāṇḍava's chariot driver and set him to his task just before the war started, when Arjuna had initially refused to fight against his own relations and

teachers (this is the *Bhagavadgītā*, the 'Song of the Lord', the Lord being Kṛṣṇa, who is Viṣṇu and usually knows it).

The internecine massacre left a very bad taste in Yudhiṣṭhira's mouth, especially when he discovered from his mother that Duryodhana's ally Karṇa, killed by Arjuna's hand, was the Pāṇḍavas' previously unrecognized elder brother. But Yudhiṣṭhira was eventually persuaded to take up kingship of the reunited kingdom, and he was taught at length in matters of statecraft and soteriology by his mortally wounded great-uncle Bhīṣma. Yudhiṣṭhira, King Dharma, then performed a horse sacrifice and ruled righteously for many years.

Vaiśaṃpāyana's recital to Janamejaya is framed from the front by the revelation that the Kurukṣetra war between his ancestors and their cousins was no ordinary war, but was an iteration of the cosmic battle between the gods and the *asuras*; the *kṣatriyas* were demonically possessed and had to die, and thus it is a tale of the gods' *avatāra* (crossing-down) to save the world. And the story of Janamejaya's *sarpasatra* and the ancestral *avatāra* tale told at it is also framed from the front, by the story of its recitation by Ugraśravas (who with his father was a guest at the *sarpasatra*) to the brahmin Śaunaka and other sages at a session in Naimiṣa Forest.

3. The *Harivaṃśa* situates itself as a continuation of the same dialogue between Vaiśaṃpāyana and King Janamejaya, and of the same dialogue between Ugraśravas and Śaunaka. In this respect it is not a third text. It contains details of Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva and his people that were peripheral to the story of the Pāṇḍavas and their cousins. But before telling of Kṛṣṇa and his people, in the *Harivaṃśaparvan* Vaiśaṃpāyana provides a wealth of cosmological and genealogical material. He narrates the line of the kings of Ayodhyā, as well as a network of lines descended from King Yayāti, including the line of the Yādava-Vṛṣṇis, Kṛṣṇa's people (descendants of Yayāti's eldest son Yadu), and the line of the Pāṇḍavas and their cousins (descendants of Yayāti's youngest son Pūru). Attention then turns, as it did in the *Mahābhārata*, to the divine plan: the *asuras* have come to earth, causing distress to lady Earth, and Viṣṇu has agreed to be born as Kṛṣṇa, to oversee her rescue by killing various demons and participating in the Kurukṣetra war.

By the time Kṛṣṇa is born his greatness has already been foretold, and so his jealous uncle Kaṃsa seeks his death, and Kṛṣṇa has to be smuggled out of Mathurā and brought up among cowherders in Vṛndāvana, where he and to a lesser extent his brother Balarāma perform many miraculous deeds before returning to Mathurā and killing Kaṃsa. Interestingly, despite being his people's greatest hero and protector, Kṛṣṇa never becomes king. The Vṛṣṇis subsequently abandon Mathurā on account of the attacks of Jarāsaṃdha and Kālayavana and move to Dvārakā; and the *Harivaṃśa* narrates various episodes concerned with the politics of Kṛṣṇa's marriages, and of those of his son Pradyumna and grandson Aniruddha. Kṛṣṇa's death has already been narrated

in the *Mausalaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*; the *Harivaṃśa* ends with the *Bhaviṣyatparvan*, 'the Book of the Future', in which Ugraśravas tells Śaunaka what happened at King Janamejaya's horse sacrifice, which took place after the *sarpasatra*.

The Critical Editions and the 'Analytic or Synthetic' Debate

The study of these texts has been problematic, in part because they are large and involving, and in part because they exist in a variety of versions, and thus different scholars have often had to study different texts. During the twentieth century, critical editions of all three texts were produced, the *Mahābhārata* and *Harivaṃśa* in Poona, and the *Rāmāyaṇa* in Baroda; texts that aimed to reconstitute, by simple comparison, the common denominators of all the manuscript traditions, with the passages found only in some manuscripts being presented as footnotes and appendices.[14]

The critically reconstituted version of a text is smaller than any of the complete manuscript versions; in the case of the *Harivaṃśa* the difference in length is particularly striking. If one conceives the reconstituted version as an attempted historical reconstruction – as this critical method is seemingly designed to enable one to do – then one views divergent manuscript traditions as having accumulated additional material through the centuries.

In the view of perhaps the majority of scholars, the gradual accumulation of interpolations over many centuries is a process which has not only been occurring since the texts reconstituted by the text-critical method were first presented (if indeed they ever were anciently presented in the forms that have been reconstituted; for the text-critical method makes a number of grounding assumptions that are not amenable to verification). Since the infancy of 'Sanskrit epic studies' within the European academy, it has been widely assumed that these texts were of a chronically accumulative character even before they reached the stage of development that the critical editors have reconstituted. Thus scholars have often stated, as if as a basis for interpretation, that the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s first and last books were later additions to an existing text, for example, or that the *Mahābhārata*'s framing story of Janamejaya and the *sarpasatra*, or most of Bhīṣma's deathbed teachings to Yudhiṣṭhira, were likewise later additions to an existing text.[15] With regard to Bhīṣma's teachings and various other sections of the *Mahābhārata* such as the *Bhagavadgītā*, a distinction has often been drawn between 'narrative' and 'didactic' passages, and hypotheses have been proposed to explain how the two came to be brought together.

Can such suggestions be satisfactorily supported? Often, it seems, there is reference to something like 'scholarly consensus'; but few scholars are in a position meaningfully to comment. In any case, according to Vishnu Sukthankar,

the first critical editor of the *Mahābhārata*, the Poona reconstituted text would be 'the oldest form of the text which it is possible to reach, on the basis of the manuscript material available' (Sukthankar, 1933, p. lxxxvi, italics removed), even though it contains many passages which have often been assumed to be, and can still be suspected of being, interpolations.

This is the modern substance of the traditional and ongoing 'analytic or synthetic' debate, whose most recent instance in *Mahābhārata* studies is due to Alf Hiltebeitel's critique of the opinions of several of his contemporaries.[16] Whatever one might make of the various specific hypotheses of the analysts (that passage *x* was in the text before passage *y*), perhaps Hiltebeitel's most valuable point is to suggest that 'the largest inadequacy in *Mahābhārata* scholarship . . . is simply the failure to appreciate the epic as a work of literature' (Hiltebeitel, 1999, p. 156). In a similar vein, Madeleine Biardeau has suggested that 'the [*Rāmāyaṇa*] text, once deprived from its first and last book, would loose its unity and its ideological meaning' (Biardeau, 1997, p. 86). But many commentators on these texts have been particularly interested in more historical types of question.

It is not irrelevant here to recall that European interest in early Indian literature was allied with the discipline of historical linguistics, and grew up in the context of keen national-existential interests in the cultural origins of the northern European ('Aryan') peoples. Much of the focus of the early European Sanskritists was overdetermined by the romantic search for origins and by the supposition that Sanskrit literature, and most particularly those segments of it that might be labelled 'older', would offer a handle close to the trunk of the 'Indo-European' ethno-linguistic tree (see Pollock, 1993, pp. 86–7). And perhaps the term 'epic' – which has been applied to Homer's ancient stratum of the Greek canon – could still very much imply such and similar concerns, for in its Indological usage its possible reference seems to slip smoothly from an identifiable and specifiable textual object (such as the Poona reconstituted *Mahābhārata*, which is apparently Hiltebeitel's aim when he uses the term 'epic' in the above quotation) to a more or less historically and generically imagined, though persistently unspecifiable, core and essence of that textual object. After the Poona edition, one still cannot use the word 'epic' Indologically except in the shadow of Edward Hopkins's labelling of much of the *Mahābhārata* as 'pseudo-epic', and his doing so with characteristic and cataclysmic certainty ('there can be no question in regard to the correctness of the term pseudo-epic', Hopkins, 1901, p. 381).[17]

However, those who would wish to think through the implications of critiquing the analytic perspective on the Sanskrit 'epics' with reference to its historical-ideological situation must also think through the possibility of not having acceptable old texts to talk about at all, since the specifiability of the Poona and Baroda texts, though apparently relatively straightforward, is

subject to a similar kind of problematic. Their recent production was imaginably premised, through and by interested parties, on their possible retrojection as reconstituted ancient artefacts; and to call the comparative text-critical method mechanical, as if to remove the formative agency of the editors, would not be quite right.

Furthermore, some scholars have maintained that these texts – though the word must then be used in a much vaguer sense – are constitutively such that the methods of comparative textual-critical scholarship do not properly apply. The most recent – and perhaps the most polemical – example is that of Wendy Doniger:

> There are hundreds of *Mahabharata*s, hundreds of different manuscripts and innumerable oral versions . . . one just as *ur* as the next. The Pune edition is critical, all right, but in the sense that it left the patient (the *Mahabharata*) in a critical condition. (Doniger, 2009b, p. 18)

Here it seems that the ailment is precisely one of singularity. In any case, the collaborative study of the 'epics' might yet suffer from uncertainty over what exactly is to be the subject of study, and some of those who would choose will inevitably criticize the choices of others in this regard. With regard to the oral hypothesis, which is also evident in many critiques of the Poona and Baroda projects prior to Doniger's, there is a current theory that *Mahābhārata* was a written text first (Hiltebeitel, 2001, 2005a). And regardless of the fall-out, the Baroda and Poona reconstituted texts do exist, singular and specified, for possible collaborative scrutiny of whatever kind – at least by Sanskritists.[18]

One recent study calls the project of producing the critical editions a project of 'nationalising the past' (van der Veer, 1999, p. 134), closely associating it with Indian, and specifically Hindu, nationalism. If one were to talk of Hindu understandings of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata* and *Harivaṃśa*, either in their critical editions or in other versions, one might mention the tendency to understand events described within the texts, in more or less exaggerated or adjusted form, as events that really happened in the distant past. Such an intentionally historical understanding would easily be suspected of being national-existential in a formatively socio-aspirational sense, and would thus have much in common with the traditional European (and now also American) view of the texts. It might arguably thus have something in common also with the attitudes of 'Vālmīki' and 'Vyāsa' to their texts. But in my view – and perhaps coincidentally, as far as the intentionality behind their modern production is concerned – the critically reconstituted texts supply a religious framework for existential textual engagement that is not essentially Hindu or Indo-European.

The Royal Imperative

These stories are about royal families; and they come together with a comprehensive monarchical scenario. It is gendered (women bear children and are not warriors), fictional, mythical, ideological, shared on the whole by other texts, and diversely analogically ramified through to the present day. The good king is said to be so necessary that the rain will not fall from the sky without him. The necessity for a king is evident also in interpersonal terms; one of his primary functions – a more credible one than literally rainmaking, perhaps – is to oversee the pursual and punishment of malefactors, thus preventing the abuse, across his realm, of the small 'fish' by the relatively big ones. The king is thus protective of his realm, in some configuration, as men are of women and children; the land itself is his wife, her good bounty their prize, and his violent action justified. The *Mahābhārata* contains extensive teachings on the duty of the king, most particularly in the first half of the *Śāntiparvan*.[19]

Across the land the king is to oversee and enforce correct distinctions between, for example, brahmins, *kṣatriyas*, *vaiśyas*, *śūdras* and animals, such that each class functions as it should, within or without the social body. Alongside his exclusive right and duty to use the rod of punishment – as King Rāma does, for example, by expressly beheading the *śūdra* Śambūka for the sin of performing *tapas*, the preserve of the twiceborn (*Rāmāyaṇa* 7.64–7)[20] – the king's main means to this end, and a practice constitutive of his kingship, would seem to be the iterated grand bloody ritual consumption and careful disbursal of wealth – wealth he has forcibly collected from his rivals and subjects – through feasts, festivals, public works, and generous funding of the deserving (overwhelmingly brahmins).

Our texts are framed stories of the narration, to kings, at their grand rituals, of extended educational and thus transformative pieces composed by brahmins. Scholarly appreciation of the contexts within which these narrations are said to occur – and of the other grand rituals depicted within the narratives – has sometimes been constrained by understandings of these rituals as more or less fictional variants of rituals that used to be historically performed; but here a nuanced approach is required, not least because the Vedic texts, many of which also describe rituals in detail, might not represent historical ritual practice any more faithfully than the post-Vedic texts do. In any case, the post-Vedic texts with which we are concerned prompt us to see them as conditioned by, and simultaneously as constitutive of, the royal ritual process that they inventively describe; and this can explain their seeming endorsement of that process as well as lending authority to their implicit critique of its imperfect realization and human cost within their narratives.

The principal audience within the texts is the single king or king-to-be, and the pieces he hears are exquisitely personal. Rāma hears his own story from his

sons. Janamejaya hears, in my reckoning from his elder brother (Brodbeck, 2009a, pp. 217–66; 2009b), the stories of Yudhiṣṭhira and Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa, and within the story of Yudhiṣṭhira, Yudhiṣṭhira hears the stories of his precursors; but one of the primary themes is that a man is replicated in his heir, and so Janamejaya by hearing about Yudhiṣṭhira is also hearing, at one remove, his own story. Rāma, being Viṣṇu in person, can hear about Viṣṇu and himself in one; Janamejaya and Yudhiṣṭhira did not have this advantage, but they heard a lot about Kṛṣṇa (and other *avatāras*) on the side.

Yet despite the regal singularity of the internal audience, the texts open themselves for application to individuals beyond these families and beyond the *kṣatriya varṇa*. Vyāsa's *Mahābhārata* (including the *Harivaṃśa*) is intended for an audience of all four *varṇas* (*Mahābhārata* 12.314:45), as is Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa* (*Rāmāyaṇa* 1.1:79); and the monarchical scenario of king and kingdom has as its most immediate deliberate analogues the family scenario of householder and household, and the personal scenario of individual subjectivity and human body.

With regard to the family scenario, the monarchical model supplies a structure whereby isolated and ranked patriarchal units jostle against each other for relative material-discursive advantage, each patrilineal generational link being a location of particular opportunity for the consolidation or the diminution of that advantage (compare Tyagi, 2008). After all, for these kings the management of the realm is in the first place the management of the royal family for continued fitness to rule. As the king is taught better to understand his situation and role as king, and thus better to be himself, and thus better to prosper himself and his significant others, and thus better to be proper within the wider world, so is the good householder citizen taught. The idea that the citizens copy the king is made explicit (*Rāmāyaṇa* 7.42:19; *Bhagavadgītā* 3:21, = *Mahābhārata* 6.25:21). In both cases the fissiparous tendencies within the managed unit – the kingdom, or the family – are an internal mirror of the external competition between adjacent units; and in both cases the manager must carefully negotiate one type of internal and yet transcendental sub-unit in particular, that is, the revered and feared necessary alien partner – brahmins for the king in political mode, and wives for the king and the householder in domestic mode. The comparison of king–brahmin relations and husband–wife relations in these texts has yet to be fully elaborated, but there is good material for it.[21]

If the structural analogues are not enough, our texts project their transformative audial effect through the listening king into the audience member by being bolstered at intervals by short passages (*śravaṇaphalas* or *phalaśrutis*) detailing the beneficial effects that hearing them is said to have. Though these passages might at first glance look as if they encode some exotic magical philosophy, they are an essential clue to the texts' operational self-awareness – that is, the texts' awareness of what they properly do. We might say that it is by being

thoroughly and deliberately textological that such texts are religious, and religious through the king; but then we might need to unpick and refashion the ways in which we have thought them to be religious in the scholarly past.

Text-internally, the protagonist and listener – king and householder – is male, and thus the text seems calculated to function more fully for male audience members than for female ones. Nonetheless there is a discernable awareness of female listeners, as Black has detailed for the *Mahābhārata* (Black, 2007). In this respect the analogy between brahmins and women is clear: both are necessarily on hand at these rituals to hear what the king hears, and just as the transformation of the king is effected, within his story, by his being instructed through the coercive story composed by a brahmin, so it can also be effected within that story by his being subject to the directions of a woman – in Yudhiṣṭhira's case through Draupadī's insistence that he and his brothers avenge her damaged honour (see especially *Mahābhārata* 3.28–33), and in Rāma's case through Sītā's insistence that he come to rescue her from Rāvaṇa's clutches himself (she refuses to escape back to Rāma bloodlessly with Hanumat, *Rāmāyaṇa* 5.35).

The Divinity of the Heroes, and the Individual Analogue

These are stories of the operations of the gods in the world of men and women (see John Smith, 1989). The main heroes of our texts, the ones who win, are gods – some aware of it, some not, depending on whatever divine bloody task is at hand. Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa are Viṣṇu. So are Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma. So is Vyāsa. The Pāṇḍavas are five Indras, and they are Dharma, Vāyu, Indra and the Aśvins. Hanumat also is a chip off the block of Vāyu. Draupadī is Śrī, and Sītā might be too. And Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa is and includes all other gods, and has the grace of Śiva.[22]

This aspect of the texts has been subject to a specific application of the analytic theory. Many scholars have believed that the divine identities of the heroes, Rāma and Kṛṣṇa for example, were overlays onto originally human characters; material that is said to be late is sometimes deprecated, as when Johannes van Buitenen referred to the divine identities of the *Mahābhārata* heroes as 'inept mythification' (van Buitenen, 1973, p. xx). Such perspectives may seem to bespeak a failure of textual appreciation, and are perhaps on the wane; Sheldon Pollock has led the way here in the matter of Rāma (Pollock, 1983–1984, 1984), John Smith has stated that 'the Kṛṣṇa of the *Mahābhārata* was divine from the start' (2009, p. xxxiv),[23] and Christopher Austin has reiterated, speaking of the *Mahābhārata*, that

> [I]t falls to the epic scholar to propose not some former state of the text, but a hypothesis as to the significance for the epic poets of such aspects of the

> poem as the mythic structure of identifications, which are irretrievably part and parcel of the poem as we have it today. (Austin, 2009, p. 622)

Luis González-Reimann has provided a critique of Pollock's arguments for the integrity of Rāma's divinity (González-Reimann, 2006), and his critique has some merit. But most of Pollock's arguments may seem to be surplus to requirements in any case, since the *Rāmāyaṇa* says what it says; and there is no new data in support of the analytic view.

My own view will be apparent: I see no good evidence for earlier versions of these texts, and in the meantime I am interested in the texts as we have them. But if analytic perspectives on this issue might seem to be predicated upon particular views of Indian religious history, much the same may often be said of synthetic perspectives; and in contrast to such views, I would like to experiment here with the possibility that the divinity of the heroes is not necessarily a result of specifically religious developments in the society outside the text – such as, for example, a rise in popular reverence for Viṣṇu – but is, in the first instance, a textological and philosophical circumstance, however much it might have affected popular religiosity.

The texts co-opt male audience members in terms of their central royal characters; they do so in terms of Viṣṇu as the great God, and they do so exhaustively, in two variants, one where Viṣṇu is the eldest and the rightful king (Rāma), and one where he is a younger brother and king-maker (Kṛṣṇa, with some slippage through to Arjuna Pāṇḍava). Fraternal dynamics are a major theme in all these texts;[24] and since even the king is subject to higher powers, the central model is applicable across the board. The texts' *carita*-style focus on individual characters matches the physical individuality of every audience member's worldly operation. The texts are meant to be taken personally; and both types of individual – those inside and those outside the texts – are smeared beyond the confines of one physical life both synchronically and diachronically through necessary connection to close and distant kin. For many audience members, self and other will be most significantly comparable if the other in question is a close relative.

If the texts, by co-opting the audience member, slip the divine light upon him, this fits the philosophical anthropology they elaborate, most particularly in those portions of the *Mahābhārata* that discourse upon the individual's composition – the *Sanatsujātīya* (5.42–5), the *Bhagavadgītā* (6.23–40), the *Mokṣadharma* (12.168–353), the *Anugītā* (14.16–50). Here there are recurring *sāṃkhya-yoga* accounts whereby the principle of subjectivity, gendered male in the analogy, is the quintessence of divinity and must be recognized as permanent, inactive and untouchable; and the objective elements of his mental and corporeal extension are multifarious and generic, like the *prakṛtis* of the kingdom,[25] operationally co-extensive with the wider external environment and subject to its

laws, but optimally to be marshalled and organized internally in top-down fashion through the yoga of the disciplined *buddhi* (or *purohita*, or chariot driver, or good wife).[26] As Sukthankar has stressed in exploring 'the story on the metaphysical plane' (Sukthankar, 1957, pp. 91–124), the extended two-sided wars that the texts dramatize are properly analogical for the human individual-soteriological drama. At the same time, because the environments internal and external to the human individual are co-extensive, the external results of yoga, even if evaluated, are always coincidental. The dependable benefit is in and through the yogic operation itself, the internal process of self-patterning which – in this variant at least – can only hang from (and thus highlights) the transcendent male *ātman*. In the *Bhagavadgītā*, when Arjuna decides just before the war that he dare not fight and kill his cousins, elders and gurus, Kṛṣṇa his chariot driver first tells him to be a man, and then, when this doesn't work, tells him to be a yogi; and this is superimposition as well as juxtaposition.

Kṛṣṇa outlines a spiritual technique of action without attachment – action offered to Kṛṣṇa and transfigured, action in the knowledge that all action is Kṛṣṇa's, that we and it are putty in his hands, that he is Time cooking us, that we are his burning hands, our motion his tic – that he says is applicable by persons both male and female. But immediately and analogically the person is male. As such, the claim of 'world literature' made at the start of this essay might seem to be based on a continuing and coercive androcentric assumption. I do not wish to make any claims about 'world literature' in general, for all that I would expect its most celebrated texts to make similar kinds of assumption. But I do think that the claims to greatness that have been made for the *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata* and *Harivaṃśa* – not least by these texts themselves – may be supported by the suggestion that these texts lay the androcentric assumption (and other associated assumptions of inequality and dominance) as bare as can effectively be; as the analogical ideology we have been discussing is presented, it can seem to be as transparent and as hollow as it is powerful. In the *Mahābhārata* the man with whom God sides can only become king – replacing his cousin who apparently did the job just as well – by lying and cheating; in the *Rāmāyaṇa* God abandons his innocent, loving wife; and in both cases years of personal misery result.

Victims of Kingship

For all that Yudhiṣṭhira is King Dharma, and for all that Rāma's reign may stand as the paradigm of perfect government, the texts present the imperial ideal as rather unpleasant. Śambūka is beheaded, as mentioned above; and elsewhere Rāma controversially shoots and kills Vālin from a concealed position when

Vālin is already engaged in combat with someone else (*Rāmāyaṇa* 4.16–18). In addition to their dastardly tactics during the war, the Pāṇḍavas immolate a family of innocent provincial *niṣādas* and massacre almost the entire population of Khāṇḍava Forest (*Mahābhārata* 1.136; 1.217–19); and Janamejaya their descendant massacres thousands of snakes (*Mahābhārata* 1.47–52).

Such scenes have prompted scholars to suppose that the texts record in some fashion the historical spread of an agrarian economic system (see for example D. D. Kosambi, 1964) and/or of a robustly patrilineal culture. If they do, this is something that has been recorded elsewhere many times across the globe; but as the Sanskrit 'epics' present it, the growing, civilizing, organizing imperium coordinates across distances and morphs into the modern notion of India as Bhārata, named after an ancestor of the Pāṇḍavas and still with us more or less as described by the Pāṇḍavas' clockwise pilgrimages (*Mahābhārata* 1.206–13; 3.80–153; 17.1–3). If Hinduism is the religion of beyond the Indus, it is religion in relation to a physical field already mapped out by the great kings of yore. The story of that mapping, which is here for the first and founding time in these three texts, is a massive resource for thinking about the exquisite relationship between individuals, actions and objects, for thinking about one's own and one's neighbour's fractured *dharma*; a story presented as inevitable and blessed, but at the same time a story of loss, horror and sorrow, a story that is far from triumphalist, that is honest about the price paid, and honest about how feuds can run on, and so may seem to include within itself the seeds of all protest against colonial modernity, all protest against marginalization and dehumanization, and all protest against inherited androcentric and patrilineal structures and categories of thought.

Structural Comparisons

Developing some thoughts of Hopkins ('two epics . . . both arranged on the same general plan', Hopkins, 1901, p. 79), Biardeau has sketched out how the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* have a shared structure: 'the development of the action is analogous to such an extent that we can superpose the books of the two and show their main sections as corresponding to each other as if they had a common bedrock' (Biardeau, 1997, p. 89). The first five books of each text are parallel (Pollock, 1986, pp. 9–10, 38–42; Hiltebeitel, 2005c, pp. 460–1; 2008), but in the *Mahābhārata* the battle portion and the final portion – which cover one book each in the *Rāmāyaṇa* – are each subdivided into several books.

There has been considerable scholarly comparison between these two texts and any number of 'epics' from various parts of Europe, Asia and the Middle East, but there is more yet to be said in comparing them to each other. Hiltebeitel

has pursued this line in a recent paper exploring similarities between Sītā and Draupadī (Hiltebeitel, 2008). Biardeau also notes that 'the parallelism between Sītā and Draupadī is striking' (Biardeau, 1997, p. 105); but there are significant differences between the two women, and these are not just in terms of their characters (Sutherland, 1989). Duryodhana makes a move against Yudhiṣṭhira's kingship *and* his wife, but the moves against Rāma's kingship and wife are separated (Kaikeyī makes one, Rāvaṇa the other). As if to counterbalance this difference, Rāma's separation from his kingdom largely overlaps with his separation from his wife, but Yudhiṣṭhira's does not.

There is a notable parallel with regard to the personnel involved in the two great wars. The victorious *Rāmāyaṇa* party of the monkeys, Rāma-Viṣṇu, and Vibhīṣaṇa (who defects from the opposition just before the battle, and thus survives to carry their line) matches the victorious *Mahābhārata* party of the Pāṇḍavas, Kṛṣṇa-Viṣṇu, and Yuyutsu Dhārtarāṣṭra. Details from before the war in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, where Rāma wins allies in the celestial war-mission by intervening decisively between the monkey brothers Vālin and Sugrīva, might thus prompt us to seek a similar intervention by Kṛṣṇa with regard to the Pāṇḍava brothers Yudhiṣṭhira and Arjuna. Here the intervention would be more protracted, and would involve Kṛṣṇa's arranging Arjuna's marriage to Subhadrā and then reviving Parikṣit (Arjuna's grandson through that marriage) to be king after the war. In both texts, one brother gets the sovereignty (Sugrīva and Yudhiṣṭhira become king) and the other gets the succession (Vālin through his son Aṅgada, and Arjuna through his grandson Parikṣit). This line of analysis sees the Pāṇḍavas as parallel to the monkeys and so suggests that we seek a parallel for Rāma's fraternal affairs within Kṛṣṇa's family, not within Yudhiṣṭhira's; and this in turn could suggest that the *Harivaṃśa* is integral to the *Mahābhārata*'s design.

'Epic' and Purāṇa

As far as the study of our three texts is concerned, the *Harivaṃśa* occupies a peculiar position; it is often considered to be the generic and chronological hinge between the 'epics' and the Purāṇas. Of these two genre terms, 'epic' has no Sanskrit equivalent, and '*purāṇa*' is applied by the 'epics' to much of their own substance;[27] but the *Harivaṃśa* is nonetheless crucial, and has been studied increasingly (see for example Couture, 1995–1996; Koskikallio, 2005, pp. 295–433).

The *Harivaṃśa* as ordinarily conceived (for example by Vaidya, 1969–1971) is confusingly so labelled, since it includes three books: the *Harivaṃśaparvan*, the *Viṣṇuparvan* containing the main story of Kṛṣṇa, and the short *Bhaviṣyatparvan*.

The *Mahābhārata* lists its own contents first in one hundred *upaparvans*, and then in eighteen *parvans*. When the *upaparvans* are enumerated, the *Harivaṃśaparvan*, the *Bhaviṣyatparvan* and at least one other are included among them, but are called *khilas* ('complements', *Mahābhārata* 1.2:69). When the *parvans* are described it is clear that although the *khilas* are part of the *Mahābhārata*, their contents fall outside the eighteen (*Mahābhārata* 1.2:233). It is this latter circumstance, perhaps, that sees them gathered together as they often are, separate from 'the *Mahābhārata*'; but separating off the *Harivaṃśa* bundle also suits the generic and chronological categories of Indology, where it tends to stand as 'the first and the oldest Purāṇa that has come down to us' (Vaidya, 1969–1971, p. xxix).

A link between the *Harivaṃśa* and the word *purāṇa* is given in the *Mahābhārata*'s list of *upaparvans*, where the *Harivaṃśaparvan* is called *purāṇa* (1.2:69; van Buitenen, 1973 omits the word from his translation, p. 36); but the other *khila parvans* making up the *Harivaṃśa* are not so called. And in this occurrence at least, the word *purāṇa* can be furnished with a very simple explanation. For the *Harivaṃśaparvan* contains as its main feature an account of the two great royal dynasties, the *sūryavaṃśa* descending from the sun (i.e. Rāma's dynasty) and the *somavaṃśa* descending from the moon (i.e. the dynasty including Kṛṣṇa's Yādava branch and the Bhārata branch of the Pāṇḍavas and Janamejaya). But by the time Janamejaya hears the *Harivaṃśaparvan* he knows that his own line, the line that comes through Bharata and the Pāṇḍavas, is now reckoned as descending from the sun (*Mahābhārata* 1.70–90), even though in former days it was reckoned as descending from the moon (see Brodbeck, 2012). So it would fit for the *Harivaṃśaparvan* to be labelled *purāṇa* in a special sense, as knowingly out-of-date – a label which in this way would not apply to the other *khila parvans*.

Many of the texts called the Purāṇas contain accounts of the *sūryavaṃśa* and the *somavaṃśa,* with the Bhāratas in the latter, as in the *Harivaṃśaparvan*. But when Ugraśravas is introducing the *Mahābhārata* he names the sun, and the sun's son, grandson and three great-grandsons, and says that each of the latter had many sons, and continues:

> From them arose the lineage of the Kurus, those of the Yadus and of Bharata, the lines of Yayāti, and Ikṣvāku, and of the royal *ṛṣis* in general. Many and diverse lineages arose and issued creatures; all of them are abodes of being. And the triple mystery is: Veda, yoga, and understanding, *dharma*, *artha*, and *kāma*. The *ṛṣi* [Vyāsa] beheld the manifold teachings – including teachings on *dharma*, *artha*, and *kāma* – and the rule that emerged for the conduct of worldly affairs. (*Mahābhārata* 1.1:44c–47, trans. after van Buitenen, 1973, p. 22)[28]

Ascetic Traditions

Sondra L. Hausner

In many ascetic traditions around the world, monastic institutions and the individuals who comprise them take on religious work for the whole of society; ascetics engage in religious practice not only for themselves but for the laity and the larger good (Tiyavanich, 1997). There are some differences between Hindu ascetic traditions and those of monastic institutions in other religions, however. Hindu ascetics often live alone even when supported by an *akhcāṛā*, or institutional regiment, while Christian or Buddhist monks and nuns tend to live together in monasteries or nunneries (Brown, 1988; Gutschow, 2006). In a Weberian mode, the cross-cultural symbol of the ascetic is one of humility, restraint and discipline. He or she may also represent isolation, but the question of relationships within ascetic traditions and between ascetics and the laity suggests that true solitude is rare. Whether alone or in concert, however, it is hoped that an ascetic may acquire wisdom and eventually reach salvation for his – or her – efforts.

This chapter reviews four approaches to ascetic traditions in contemporary scholarship: the question of social relationships; methodological considerations of text and of praxis; the practices of mysticism and yoga; and the concerns of globalization. By cross-cutting these four sets of questions in new ways, or building on the foundations of one while interrogating another, we can continue to give thought-provoking consideration to the symbol, representation and reality of an idiosyncratic figure in Hindu life.

Social Relationships: Individual and Society

Since the work of Louis Dumont, studied of ascetics have, ironically enough, focused on the question of their relationships. Dumont's claim was to the contrary: he argued that the ascetic had none, or at least many fewer than the caste householder in India. Caste was the model used by Dumont for his study of Indian society writ large, or structurally speaking, and the ascetic stood outside of this matrix. Even if the ascetic had to be defined in negation, Dumont – like most scholars writing on ascetic traditions after him – was concerned with the subject position of the *sannyāsī*, referred to as *le renonçant* or *l'individu-hors-du-monde* (the renouncer, or individual-outside-the-world), in comparison to *l'homme-dans-le-monde* (the man-in-the-world), or those in larger caste society: these two categories had to be related. Indeed, Dumont suggests that 'the secret of Hinduism may be found in the dialogue between the renouncer and the man-in-the-world' (Dumont, 1980 [1966], p. 270).

But in our discussions of ascetic traditions – in the plural – might the operative terms of social distinction refer rather to other ascetics? Richard Burghart reminds us that part of the question of relationships depends upon whose view you take – the world looks different if you're an ascetic (Burghart, 1996 [1983]). You might be much more concerned with your relationships with other ascetics, among whom you travel more frequently and with whose experiences and priorities you may more readily compare your own, than with your relationships with householders. Ascetics themselves, Burghart reminds us, establish their own communities and traditions: depending on how we break down social categories, Śaivas, Vaisnavas; Giris, Puris, Bhāratīs; Nimbārkas; Rāmānandis; Bairāgis; and Nāths each designate a category of ascetics, and the list could go on, and be broken down further, by status or level of initiation. Daśnāmī *sannyāsīs* (of whom Giris, Puris and Bhāratīs comprise three) may represent the ten lines of ascetic orders, often affiliated to Śaiva sects, but Vaiṣṇava (including Bairāgi, Rāmānandi and Tyāgī sub-sects), Nāth and Udasin orders also all occupy prominent places on the national stage of Hindu ascetic traditions.

Whether the relationship be to householder (Madan, 1982, esp. Thapar, 1982), to brahmin (Heesterman, 1964; Olivelle, 1992), to king (Burghart, 1996 [1983]; Pinch, 1996)[29] or to other ascetics (Gross, 1992; Sinha and Saraswati, 1978), our concerns never stray far from the perennial question of whether it is possible – or spiritually or psychologically desirable – to be set apart entirely from society. Many ethnographies show overlapping social relationships between householders and ascetics (as in the case of the swami who tells stories to visiting householders in Kirin Narayan's account [1989]); in the parallel positions of ritual power between brahmin and ascetics (see Ravindra Khare's description of Lucknow Chamar ascetics, who 'often replaced the brahmin priest' [1984, p. 80]); or in the high-level patronage relations between kings and ascetics (as deftly detailed by Veronique Bouillier in the case of the Nepali kings and the Nāth *sampradāya* [1998]). Are 'ascetic' and 'householder' actually oppositional terms in the larger perspective of Hindu society, or are they better thought of as collaborative ones, meaning that the two poles hold each other in balance?

The approach that Dumont brought to the study of Indian ascetic traditions suggests that social systems are based on structural relationships. The basic split in Hindu society was that between householderhood, which represented communal life, and renunciation, which represented individuality, and thereby an ability to break free from the confines of collectivity. Theoretically, these categories were distinct and could not overlap, although we see that in practice there are many more grey areas than such a model would allow. (Consider the ascetics documented by Khare, who fall on a continuum of 'asceticlike householders and householderlike ascetics' [1984, p. 80], or the Rajasthani married,

householder-ascetic Nāth caste described by Ann Grodzins Gold [1992].) While Dumont posits a binary opposition between being a householder and being an ascetic, then, we know from the ethnographic record that oppositions can be charted in all kinds of ways: in their relations, their actions and their everyday practices, ascetics and householder Hindus act both as individuals and as members of families, networks and social orders, and, most importantly, live nuanced relationships that shift within the contours of everyday life (Hausner, 2007).

Still, symbolically, the distinction between worldliness and asceticism is an important one: being inside the world and being outside the world must be defined in relation to each other, and these two states posit a salient conceptual and practical distinction in Hindu thought. When Dumont writes that being an ascetic is to occupy 'a social state apart from society proper' (1980 [1966], p. 273), he reminds us that difference, opposition and alterity are part of the point of asceticism. Whether in the role of powerful or liminal ritualist or herbalist, social outcast/e, or radical militant, to be an ascetic is to be willing to defy mainstream society, and to throw off its bounds and constraints. To follow the path of an ascetic is, as Dumont reminds us, precisely to renounce social convention, nominally in pursuit of a higher religious goal that is in practice incompatible with the hierarchical order of society.

Methods of Approach: Practice and Text

The ethnographic record shows us that it may not be possible to come to a full understanding of ascetic life from textual sources alone. Dumont's renouncers occupy an idealized, static category and appear quite different from living ascetics who accommodate paradoxes and uncertainty, and who find ways to cut across constraining categories when they do not fit the circumstances of lived existence. Ascetic practices may be described in complex detail in ritual texts, but they may also extend beyond textual prescriptions to accommodate the exigencies of everyday life. That is, ascetic practice may be performed to fulfil a ritual injunction, but may also, alternatively, be performed as either symbolic acquiescence or symbolic opposition to social codes that may or may not be explicit in a particular context. The way an ascetic smears ash on his or her body, for example, or wears flowers in his or her hair, constitute examples of daily practice that are not likely to appear in a formal code of ritual or ascetic conduct.

For many ascetics, disciplined practice has a specific meaning, namely training in the sustained control over the activities of the mind and the desires of the body. Such whirlwinds of human thought and craving prevent the householder – as well as the untrained or unpracticed ascetic – from attaining *mokṣa*,

or liberation, from the social and material worlds, and perceiving the true state of reality. Learning how to exert control over the mind and body – engaging in disciplined practice – inverts the default state whereby most of us are rather controlled by our thoughts, passions and bodily needs. Practice here means a specific kind of religious discipline that, again, may be detailed in textual sources, or may simply be the innovation of a particular teacher, passed down through his or her lineage orally, until such time as it is inscribed in a text.

For anthropologists who have worked with ascetics, practice is a wide category, encompassing ritual or religious practice, bodily practice, the disciplines of *tapasya*, and the practices of everyday life, which include both personal and collective activities. While ritual may adhere more or less closely to textual descriptions, the variable practices of quotidian life will almost certainly diverge from textual injunctions. Social practices – such as the practice of renouncing society – may be described in texts, but the subtle dynamics that determine these practices may not be. Leaving one's natal or marital home to wander as an ascetic, for example, may be an act undertaken with the hope of evading social inequality, such as discrimination experienced on the basis of gender or caste – even though such structures of inequity have been perpetuated by the very texts that prescribe ascetic behaviour. These elements of – and motivations for – practice will not be textually encoded, but may be textually produced, and will certainly be socially experienced.

Practices of identity, too, may fall into a category of either bureaucratic or ritual behaviour (or both), and may be thought to compose a different element of religion, in that they contribute to and reify a category of belonging. Institutions produce religious identity – consider the way that census bureaus, departments of state, governments and nationalist movements all categorize or classify people by religious affiliation, and how sets of practices both contribute to these categories and follow from them. Even the most anti-social and transcendent of institutions, ascetic orders constitute administrative hierarchies that, in conjunction with the state, produce certificates of asceticism: with these pieces of identification, a *sādhu* might be allowed passage to certain holy sites that might otherwise be restricted.

Consider the *sādhu* who shows off his ascetic identity card to the anthropologist, such that he can prove that he has been to Amar Nāth, the ice *liṅgam* in Kashmir, territory that is contested between India and Pakistan. The ascetic demonstrates to his interlocutor that he is an official *sādhu*, and also that he successfully accomplished an arduous and politically delicate pilgrimage. He has been designated as a Hindu ascetic by his organization and by the state, and he has fulfilled the actions of a Hindu ascetic in his practice. He has been recognized as a Hindu, been certified as a Hindu and behaved as a Hindu. The politics of Hinduism have been furthered in some sense: what it is to be a Hindu ascetic has been confirmed and reified.

Conceptually, then, we might distinguish between text and practice as two modes of inquiry, much as we would posit a distinction between doctrine and ritual as two objects of religious study. If orthodoxy refers to doctrinal systems of belief, orthopraxy might refer to ritual systems of practice. But in addition, we need to distinguish between ritual practice and everyday practice – or between the practices of ritual and the practices of daily existence, which will not always overlap, even if the ascetic operates in a full-time religious milieu. In some instances, ritual text and ritual practice will parallel or mirror each other with astonishing consistency, as they were perhaps meant to do, but there will also be occasions where textual doctrine and everyday practice do not reinforce – and might even literally contradict – each other.

The Heart of the Matter: Mysticism and Yoga

Ascetic practitioners have no choice but to negotiate the body, and so they may as well use it as yogic terrain. Embodiment is a tricky business, however, with the body able to produce clear and pure perception (if misapprehension is removed) and the most blissful experiences imaginable, but also dangerously delusory information (if bodily experience is blindly followed) and wretched pain. Successfully navigating the course of a human body, or maximizing its potential in the world while refusing to be drawn into its lair, must be the central challenge of being an ascetic.

Both textual and practical accounts of the practices of asceticism are concerned with the transmutation of gender and sexuality, those iconic signs or marks of the body. The easiest and most accessible codes for a dualistic universe are male and female; dubbed *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti* in the Sāṃkhya-Yoga view (Eliade, 1958 [1954]; Hiriyanna, 1993), the two archetypical poles of material existence represent all manner of power relationships. Their differentiation marks the undoing of that state to wards which ascetic practitioners aspire in their reparations towards union.

Gender is, of course, not only a powerful symbol of duality, but also a pervasive social division; gender discrimination may be precisely the reason that women ascetics choose to renounce householder society or patriarchal families in the first place. In the experiences of women ascetics, we have an important case of how social reality may diverge from doctrine: on one hand, gender is nothing but a philosophical category, 'a mere attribute' of the human body (Khandelwal, 1997, p. 80). On the other, being a woman makes a difference at the level of lived experience, in terms of potential respect and in terms of access or social restrictions. Real-life *sannyāsinīs* live within these contradictions of ascetic life on a daily basis (Denton, 2004; Hausner and Khandelwal, 2006; Khandelwal, 2004).

Similarly, textual discourses on the *yoginī* vary: in some accounts, they are considered valuable ritual partners, while in others they are denigrated (Kinsley, 1997; Samuels, 2008). Being female means being in the minority or less powerful category, but it also means embodying the feminine aspect incarnate. A. K. Ramanujan reminds us that the female-attributed qualities of love and maternal care will always mean respect for *sannyāsinīs* (Ramanujan, 1982). Inherent in women ascetics are the multiple capacities to come forward, to aid and abet, in maternal love; and most critically, to enable, or to bring forth, out of stasis or inertia.

Yogic practitioners strive to see through or penetrate what they might call the illusory forms of material reality, or unreality. Part of the ascetic path is precisely detachment from the body, 'a foul-smelling, tormented, dwelling-place of living beings', as the *Laws of Manu* would tell us (Doniger and Smith, 1991, p. 124). The body in its differentiated state is foul, and false, so undermining caste, gender or indeed materiality or sociality in any form is consistent with certain ascetic or yogic paths. The potential union of opposites – as a directive towards or index of the salience of that state where differentiation no longer exists materially or conceptually – is a powerful image in Hindu ascetic thought. Mythically, Pārvatī herself repairs to the mountains for a disciplined, frugal and isolated practice in pursuit of her consort, Śiva, the Lord of Ascetics.

But the ascetic needs his body, for how else can s/he transcend materiality? Power over the body is metaphorical for power over the universe, just as religious power might be seen as equivalent to social power. What is a body good for but to enable transcendence? And once the body is considered legitimate terrain for ascetic practice, is there a limit to be drawn? Is piercing the skin a legitimate practice (Dirks, 1997)? Is sitting by a cremation pyre, the very site of impurity, a viable means of realization? Is sexual intercourse with a tantric partner, in an attempt to become whole through union, an effective counter to being alone in an ascetic body?

The extent to which ascetic practices are viewed as more valuable in physical or mental form – whether the use and manipulation of the body is seen as a more direct route to realization than the training of the mind – has varied considerably over several thousand years of ascetic tradition in Hindu India. Physicality has been challenged as a lower form of action, in what begins to appear as a perennial human concern with dominance, tradition and power (McEvilley, 1981). The only appropriate retort, of course, is that as soon as we rank anything – person, practice, place – we reinscribe duality all over again. If ascetic practices aspire to a truly undifferentiated state, there can be no higher or lower, no purity or pollution. These categories are all products of human perception.

Contemporary Concerns: Local and Global

Hindu ascetics use a religious language that emphasizes a system of lineage and continuous religious instruction to create a community in dispersion. In South Asia itself, ascetics who are not rooted to any one place may be nonetheless connected, through pilgrimage circuits and festival cycles (Hausner, 2007). By claiming pilgrimage locations as their collective home base, renouncers meet not only members of their own community, but also lay-pilgrims from all over India, as well as spiritually inclined Western travellers. The mythical links between disparate sacred spaces thus enable social networks to arise among ascetics, and also among their followers.

Ascetics may demonstrate how a group may be bound together across space through the practices of religion and religious identity, but such networks are not limited to the country of India or to the region of South Asia. Hindu ascetics are sometimes themselves members of the international diaspora: certainly renouncers have been travelling to the West at least since Swami Vivekananda attended the World's Parliament of Religion in Chicago at the end of the nineteenth century. This trend continues, with *sannyāsīs* invited to visit Europe and America at the request and with the material support of members of the South Asian Hindu diaspora and Westerners who have been introduced to Hindu spirituality later in life, in what we might call its globalized form.

In the Hindu diaspora, a scaled-up emphasis on sacred space may promote religion-based political movements that enable ties between disparate groups in far-flung locations. Ascetics are sometimes seen as the symbols of Hindu religious identity and practice, much as the sacred places which they use to sustain themselves can be cast as the emblems of Hindu terrain. Part of reconstructing Hinduism in diaspora contexts has been encouraging an awareness of pilgrimage places as icons of a dispersed community: if sacred places create social and spatial networks for wandering ascetics within South Asia, why not use them to create symbolic networks for Hindus across the world? In this construction, we begin to understand how the symbolics of space and power can mobilize religious politics: if place is integral to religious identity practitioners who might be separated by thousands of miles may use symbolic references to shared territories and temples in order to feel connected to one another and to their greater soteriological goals.

Ascetics are often at the heart of these symbolic claims. To a nationalist movement, ascetics who live or practise in holy places – Ayodhya, Varanasi, Hardwar, Kathmandu – represent the ostensibly unchanging core of Hinduism. In 2001, the *maṭhs*, or monastic institutions, of Varanasi supported the resistance at the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to Deepa Mehta's film about the plight of Hindu widowhood. In 2004, the World Hindu Federation (WHF) demonstrated its transnational links by sending a gift to Hindu priests based in Sydney,

Australia, who were building a replica of Nepal's national Pashupatinath temple in 2010, the great *sādhu* processions that took place at the Kumbh Mela in Hardwar did so alongside an enormous camp established by the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP). Because ascetics are perceived to embody Hindu knowledge and practice, thereby accruing considerable religious power, they can serve to rally people to political causes in the name of Hinduism (Menon, 2010).

Global movements and migrations do not all proceed in the direction of Indians moving to the West. A number of ascetic organizations in India have recently admitted Westerners to their ranks;[30] in April 2010, one regiment promoted three long-standing foreigner members to serve as the international representatives of the Juna Akhara (see Rampuri, 2005). The phenomenon of Westerners taking an interest in and even joining Hindu ascetic orders is not new: colonial and traveller accounts that go back at least a century document a fascination with – a simultaneous distrust in and glorification of – ascetic pursuits (Brunton, 1935). What might be new, however, is how political and social organizations on both sides of the world are becoming increasingly aware of transnational practices that span territory, region and nationality, and increasingly interested in using these connections to their advantage, grounded as they are in the material world.

Bhakti Traditions

Karen Pechilis

Bhakti is a Sanskrit term that was invested with meanings of 'devotion' in the sense of 'active participation in worship' in the Sanskrit *Bhagavad Gītā* (ca. 100 CE), a Hindu text that was the first to overtly thematize, prioritize and explain the term over the course of a lengthy, independently circulating narrative that might well be thought of as a treatise on bhakti. Though extraordinarily influential, the *Gītā* was not the first, nor did it have the last word on the meanings of bhakti, and recent scholarship has been concerned with the development, evolution and contested nature of the term across Indian texts and traditions.

This essay discusses the *Gītā* as a foundational text for understanding the nature of bhakti in the Indian context, including bhakti's Hindu expressions in later Sanskrit texts as well as poetry in regional languages, noting its relationships to other traditions, including Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. Bhakti, while – or because – it was never claimed as a central tenet of a specific school or tradition (*sampradāya*), nevertheless was both used and contested across Indian religious traditions, which inflected it with specific meanings.[31] This essay discusses these diverse interpretations through a review of scholarly works in English that theorize bhakti, including major approaches to the study

of bhakti; the significance of bhakti for understanding Indian traditions; and new directions in the study of bhakti.

Approaches to the Study of Bhakti

The Origins of Bhakti

The origin of bhakti was a question of early fascination to scholars one hundred years ago, who are now labelled 'orientalist' for their assumptions about the superiority of Western traditions even as they initiated important philological, historical and comparative methods for the study of Indian religions. One such assumption was that bhakti, as a devotional tradition, probably emerged from early contact between Christians, who possessed the idea of a loving God, and Indians, who translated it into their own context. The prooftext for this now discredited attribution was both a scene in the *Mahābhārata* epic and the perceived similarity between Christ and Krishna, beginning with their names and extending into their biographies.[32]

More careful, recent studies have located bhakti as present in the earliest strata of Indian religious literature, the Vedas, which includes the Vedic hymns plus directly related literatures, including the Upaniṣads. This scholarship has revised earlier scholarship, predominantly that of the Orientalists, which prioritized the epics in imagining the origins of bhakti and tended to view the earlier Vedic corpus as discordant with bhakti; that is, they privileged both the Śvetadvīpa legend in Book Twelve of the *Mahābhārata* epic (ca. 200 BCE–200 CE) and the *Bhagavad Gītā*, which is part of Book Six of the epic. Instead, recent scholars take the view that bhakti's 'structures are unintelligible as long as they are cut off from Vedic Revelation.'[33] For example, the Vedic hymns' central ritual of sacrifice presents themes concordant with bhakti in that it 'enables the mind to yoke itself to a god through the visionary power originally bestowed by the god and to direct it to the transcendental realms.'[34] The Upaniṣads theorize this deep connection between the human and divine in their emphasis on the connections or equivalences among 'ritual, cosmic realities, and the human body/person' such as in their use of the term *bandhu*, which can mean kin, connection or counterpart.[35]

Attention to the heart, a major theme in bhakti, is prominent in the Vedic hymns as well as the Upaniṣads. The Vedic hymns suggest that '[t]he heart is the seat of divine knowledge, wisdom, intuitive perception, insight and inspiration and contains the treasures of celestial vision', directly in relation to knowledge of the gods and their knowledge of humankind. In addition, hymns are devoted to specific gods, such as Agni, Indra and Varuṇa, who are viewed as having a personal relationship with the petitioner.[36] In the Upaniṣads, the heart

is a 'cavity', that is, 'the seat of the vital powers and the self and plays a central role in the explanations of the three states of awareness – waking, dreaming, and dreamless sleep – as well as of death'.[37]

In the *Kaṭha* and *Śvetāśvatana Upaniṣad*s the divine 'is no longer a neutral principle'; the divine's relationship with the human seeker has 'an element of election, grace . . . The disciple's knowledge and his assiduity in his exercises do not suffice to ensure the success of his undertaking if the Puruṣa himself does not call him'.[38] These two late Upaniṣads, the former endorsing Viṣṇu and the latter endorsing Śiva,[39] are part of the Taittirīya School's Black Yajurveda corpus, and the major theme of the Yajurveda is the priest who is charged with performing the ritual actions and knowing their extensive symbolic meanings; these ritualistic and speculative texts' valuation of careful, conscientious action in the world is a 'thread' connecting them to bhakti's emphasis on action in the world.

Scholarship that asserts and explores relationships between Vedic literatures and bhakti is important in that it illuminates ways in which tradition is made through continuity and change, appropriation and interpretation and selection. These studies provide a sense of the continuities and new directions in Hindu tradition from the Vedas to the *Gītā*, yet it is also potentially problematic that they tend to rely on the *Gītā*'s definition of bhakti to find consonant elements in the Vedas. That is, they read from the *Gītā* back to the Vedas. So, for example, the this-worldly focus of the Vedic hymns, with their material ritual performances in the world and for the world, is emphasized in such studies, as are passages in the Vedas that name and express reverence to specific deities, insofar as they suggest a relationship between the human and the divine as well as the presence of the divine in the world.

The scholarly emphasis on the texts' shared theistic worldview, however, may have elided an important equivalence in the *Śvetāśvatana Upaniṣad* that is mentioned in perhaps the first explicit use of the term *bhakti* in an extant narrative text: 'Only in a man who has the deepest love (*bhakti*) for God, and who shows the same love (*bhakti*) towards his teacher as towards God, do these points declared by the Noble One [the author of the text] shine forth.'[40] The issue is whether guru and God are taken to be one and the same, or whether they are distinctive. The *Bhagavad Gītā* influentially conflates the two: Krishna is both spiritual teacher to Arjuna (who asks Krishna to 'tell me definitively which is the course by which I will attain to the supreme good'), and God (as praised by Arjuna: 'The original God, the Person Eternal,/You are of this world the ultimate support').[41] This mutual identification of guru and god remained dominant in Hindu developments over the centuries.

Scholars point to the significance of bhakti to the guru in their attempt to revise the scholarly emphasis on bhakti as defined by Hindu theism. Recent scholarship on the non-theistic traditions of Buddhism and Jainism asserts that

bhakti is characteristic of them as well and that they could have played a role in the early development of bhakti. Such scholars point to these traditions' separation of the guru concept as distinct from the God concept, and their endorsement of devotion (bhakti) to their respective human gurus, primarily the Buddha (ca. 563–483 BCE) and the Jina Mahāvīra (ca. 599–527 BCE), but also including other revered teachers in these traditions. Karel Werner argues that bhakti (Pali *bhatti*) is significant in Theravāda Buddhism, especially in devotion to the person of the Buddha as evidenced by several features, including the central role of stūpa memorials to the Buddha and practices associated with them; the formula of taking refuge in the Buddha; devotional acts such as prostration before his image; and the emotional dimension of the Buddhist sequence of the fourfold states of mind, *mettā* (loving-kindness), *karuṇā* (compassion), *muditā* (sympathetic joy) and *upekkhā* (equanimity). Yet, as his conclusion makes clear, Werner creates an argument by way of similarity – the presence of devotional activities in Buddhist tradition forms an implicit endorsement of bhakti that is like the explicit promotion of bhakti in Hinduism: 'Love and devotion are a means or an aid to salvation in Buddhism as in any other tradition which explicitly emphasizes the path of *bhakti*.'[42]

In a recent article, John Cort argues that bhakti has an *explicit* status in Jain tradition; that there was an 'indigenous development of devotional practices and patterns within the Jain tradition and in particular in some of the earliest available levels of the tradition', and thus Jain bhakti was not derived from Hindu sources.[43] He points to the development of bhakti in 'mendicant-based traditions as a natural growth from *guru-vandana* or veneration of the living mendicant gurus', which applies to the Jinas, who 'were seen as God'.[44] So, the Jain sense of bhakti brought together guru and God, much as the *Śvetāśvatana Upaniṣad* did. The difference is that, '[a]ccording to the understanding of the ontological nature of the liberated Jina accepted by all Jains, the Jina is totally nonresponsive, even to the faith-filled petitions of the Jina's devotees. The Jina is defined as *vītarāga*, one who has conquered (*vīta*) all passions (*rāga*), even positive passions such as compassion, and thus is totally dispassionate'.[45] And so, according to widely revered authoritative teachings, the Jina is not responsive as a god figure is.

This is a major issue that is distinctive from the *Bhagavad Gītā*'s promotion of action without regard to the fruits of action, since the *Gītā* grounds its perspective in devoting all actions to god Krishna, who responds to human need.[46] According to Cort, the problem of the Jinas' lack of responsiveness 'has been addressed by the Jain theologians, and it is in their explanations that the earliest Jain references to bhakti are found'. However, all of the references he cites, several from 'conservatively to the early centuries C.E.'[47] and many from much later, seem to make it clear that bhakti is comparable to 'charms and spells',[48] and that it is most appropriate 'for all those who have passions'[49] – and it is clear

that the most accomplished on the path do not have such passions. Even when the language of a Jain text is most 'reminiscent' of the *Gītā*, as in the Digambara Kundakunda's *Niyamasāra*'s assertion that bhakti to the guru is a yoga that destroys karma and thus serves as a path to liberation, the Jain text locates that path as 'relative' (dependent on externals), and thus it does not truly destroy karma as does the 'absolute' path (independent of externals).[50]

Cort's argument is against locating bhakti exclusively in Jain lay practice, for ' . . . one of the contributions of Jainism to our understanding of bhakti is that most ascetic practices in the Jain tradition are performed in the spirit of enthusiastic bhakti to the Jinas and the gurus', but his own examples suggest that while bhakti may be viewed as an efficacious path for laypeople and monastics, it is a problematic path in Jainism, and thus it is honourable but not the highest path.[51] It seems that it may have been the Jain authors of key texts themselves who relegated practitioners of bhakti to 'second class Jains', in Cort's terminology, but frankly I would prefer more neutral language and tone in the consideration of such questions.[52] More interesting is Whitney Kelting's study of Jain laywomen, in which she demonstrates that a group of women publicly sing devotional songs (*stavan*) that 'abound with' requests to the Jinas.[53] The performers are quite aware of the difference between such religiosity and orthodox teachings, and they interpretively address those issues, for example: 'Women often explained to me that the external acts of devotion were an extension of the internal state of devotion. Thus, if you are so devoted inside that you sing loudly in the temple, your devotion is understood by Mahāvīr, even though he is unaffected.'[54] Moreover, the performers claim and exercise an authority in interpreting the hymns in the Jain community.[55]

The issue of 'borrowing' that Cort raises has been complicated by scholarship for quite some time;[56] recent studies, including my own, have stressed 'response' as a valid historical mode.[57] If today one politicizes historical possibilities of response, including transformative borrowing, accommodation, rejection and conforming – especially within the context of patronage – taking umbrage seemingly on behalf of the traditions one studies that such discussion diminishes them, then in my view we have a lot more in common with polemicists than with post-modern, post-orientalist scholars.[58] It is not alright to limit the possibilities of our historical subjects' responses based on our own biases.

Clearly the Jain authors were trying to locate bhakti within their visions of correct practice. Why was bhakti on their radar screen? From the late Upaniṣads? From the popularity of the *Mahābhārata* epic? Because people in the Jain community asked learned persons to comment on an idea that was gaining traction? Or did the Jains originate the concept as a way of identifying and locating various paths? It is possible that the first mention of bhakti was the Buddhist and/or Jains' version of it as an efficacious path, though highly qualified as such; then the *Gītā* could be viewed as centralizing a circumscribed technique

in other traditions, which is a common strategy in the history of religions – were the handful of texts Cort cites of an appropriate date well enough known for that?

Based on much internal evidence, the *Gītā* is widely understood among scholars as locating itself as a rejection of the world-renouncing premises of Buddhism, Jainism and the Upaniṣads, in favour of action in the world; it does not diminish the text to recognize such location, and in fact it aids in understanding the richness of the text. It is also possible that, in response to the *Gītā*'s marginalization of ascetic withdrawal, Jain and Buddhist texts sought to marginalize the *Gītā*'s insistent promotion of bhakti as the greatest path among all known paths. In this connection, does the Jain and Buddhists' seeming linking of bhakti with laypeople and/or lower-level monastics have to be viewed as a negative? The *Gītā* seems to take up the issue of laypeople insofar as Arjuna is from the royal caste and not the Brahman, priestly elite; the text promotes action in the world rather than what was then, according to many religious traditions, the elite technique of world rejection;[59] and the text is embedded within a popular epic. This populist currency of bhakti was diversely explored in the fourth to ninth centuries CE. For example, Daud Ali discusses the contemporaneous imagining of bhakti in Indian courtly literature, which stressed courtiers' loyalty to the political lord, in a context in which 'religious and political notions of lordship differed more in degree than kind'. One of the prominent terms used to describe this loyalty was *bhakti*: 'But perhaps the most valuable of these qualities for those in royal service, however was loyalty, usually denoted by the terms *bhakti*, "devotion", or *anurāga*, "affection or attachment"'. In another example, the early Tamil bhakti saints (ca. seventh–ninth centuries) represent bhakti as applicable to all, expressed in poetry in the Tamil, not Sanskrit, language.[60] Could their approach have borrowed from the Jain and Buddhist linking of bhakti to laypeople?

With these populist associations in mind, it is intriguing to consider that the historically unambiguous response to the *Gītā* was in fact elite: It served as one of the *prasthānatrayī* ('three systems') or three texts on which the foremost medieval philosophers, Śaṅkara (788–820), Rāmānuja (1017–1137), and Mādhva (1238–1317), commented (along with the Upaniṣads and the Brahmā Sūtras). Why was there an interlude between southern and northern bhakti poet–saints in which the elite philosophers chose the *Gītā* as a foundational text? After this elite appropriation, the *Gītā* was explicitly rendered in the vernacular Marathi language by Jñāneśvar (1275–1296; his commentary on the text is called *Jñāneśvari*), and the beloved fifteenth- and sixteenth-century North Indian saints, such as Kabīr and Mīrābāī, also express bhakti as applicable to all in the vernacular (Hindi, Rajasthani, Gujarati). These questions deserve consideration in a neutrally toned and informed scholarly consideration.

Defining Bhakti

In 1988, the now late Krishna Sharma published an important book, *Bhakti and the Bhakti Movement: A New Perspective*, which argued for putting issues of defining bhakti in the foreground of scholarly inquiry. Through a thorough review of Orientalist scholars, Sharma traced their consensus that bhakti was to be most aptly, if not exclusively, defined as 'devotion to a personal deity', with the deity being a form of Viṣṇu 'with attributes' (*saguṇa*). What this formulation, which Sharma contends came to be widely assumed in modern studies, precluded was a meaningful inclusion of different perspectives on bhakti, including saints who sang of the impersonal divine 'without attributes' (*nirguṇa*), Kabīr in particular, as well as Ṣūfī and Śaiva formulations. Sharma sought to reinscribe bhakti as a term that generally meant 'devotion', which could be distinctively envisioned by multiple religions of India. One of the many places she makes this point is in her discussion of two authoritative medieval treatises on bhakti, the *Śāṇḍīlya Bhakti Sūtra* and the *Nārada Bhakti Sūtra* (ca. twelfth century):

> . . . they are invariably quoted in all academic discussions on bhakti. But neither of them deals with bhakti as a doctrine (siddhānta). Both speak of bhakti in the general sense of devotion while analyzing its nature and significance. Even as devotion, it is not approached by the two sūtrakāras in exactly the same manner and spirit. In spite of their common theme, there exist obvious differences between the two which only prove our contention that the term bhakti was always understood in its general meaning and could, therefore, be explained from different points of view in the different religio-philosophical traditions . . . Whereas Śāṇḍīlya's approach is more in keeping with Nirguṇa-bhakti and the classical systems of Sāṅkhya and Vedānta, Nārada shows a greater leaning towards the Purāṇic tradition and the sectarian characteristics of the Bhāgavatas and their Saguṇa mode of bhakti. The difference between Nārada and Śāṇḍīlya as well as the nature of Śāṇḍīlya's exposition of bhakti show once again that bhakti was never taken as a synonym for Vaishṇava devotion. Also that no antagonism between bhakti and Vedānta was ever recognized, and that bhakti could be interpreted in the Purāṇic-Vaishṇava and the Upanishadic-Vedāntist terms.[61]

My own theoretical discussion of bhakti regarded Sharma's work as a pioneering and important effort, a view that was not popular at the time.[62] Taking up her theme of attention to definitions of bhakti, I challenged her emphasis on 'devotion' as well as the imagining of God (*nirguṇa* and *saguṇa*) by arguing for

a more human-centric (embodied) understanding of bhakti. Specifically, in my view the 'general sense' of bhakti that its proponents and critics share is that of active participation in honouring the divine on the part of ordinary human beings, and thus 'participation' offers a more apt English definition of bhakti than 'devotion'. Also, 'devotion' tends to obscure the intellectual agenda of bhakti in its attempts to define humankind's place in the world, instead over-emphasizing the emotional response to the divine.[63] While emotions certainly can be prominent in some of the bhakti poetry, bhakti is an existential mode informed by intellectual principles – if bhakti is distinctive across traditions, as Sharma argues, and this has been her most enduring contribution – it cannot be otherwise.

Taking up this question of difference, I demonstrated that meanings of bhakti evolve over time through distinctive interpretations *within* 'one' tradition, Tamil Śiva-bhakti, as the site of its expression changed (ca. 700–1400) from the voices of poet–saints, to performers in imperial temple rituals and authors who wrote hagiographies of the saints, to interpretations of the saints' hymns by Tamil Śaiva siddhānta philosophers. These various agents, all of whom participated in honouring the divine with reference to the saints' hymns, put into relief shared assumptions about bhakti and what was at stake in their different perspectives on and practices of it.

In a recent article, Jack Hawley has revisited the notion Sharma flagged of a 'bhakti movement', which is a pervasive image of bhakti even if it is unclear that any one has argued for understanding bhakti as such an organized social expression in premodern Indian history.[64] As Sharma discussed at length in an Appendix, the oft-cited prooftext of such a 'movement' is from the *Bhāgavata Māhātmya* (chapter 1, verse 48): 'I (Bhakti) was born in Draviḍa; and grew up in Karnāṭaka. I lived here and there in Mahārāshṭra; and became weak and old in Gujarat.'[65] It is the case that dates of prominent exponents of bhakti do resonate with this verse's chronology, for example, Tamil poet–saints (Śaiva *nāyanmar*s and Vaiṣṇava *ālvār*s, ca. 600–900), Kannada poet–saints (Liṅgāyat/Vīraśaivas, ca. twelfth century), Maharashtra poet–saints (Namdev and Chokamela, fourteenth century) and Gujarāt (e.g. Narasinha Mehtā of the fifteenth century, though there are earlier saints), but as Sharma discusses, the verse is not a neutral depiction but rather a polemical one, with Brindavan represented as the place where bhakti was 'revived' once again through recitation of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.[66] In his archaeology of this and related tropes involved in the image of bhakti as a movement, Hawley points to Hindi scholars Hazariprasad Dvivedi and Ramcandra Sukla's use of the term *āndolan*, 'wave' or 'movement', in their scholarship of the second quarter of the twentieth century and its nationalist impulses; the probable invention of the southern *catuḥ sampradāya* (the four traditions associated with Rāmānuja, Madhva, Nimbārka and Viṣṇusvāmī) by the Rāmānand *sampradāya* (ca. sixteenth century); the development of these traditions' identities

as sectarian 'movements' by reformers such as Rājā Jaisingh II (eighteenth century); and the crystallization of these 'movements' as definitional to Vaiṣṇavism in the nineteenth-century scholarship of Bharatendu Hariscandra.[67] Bhakti became increasingly identified as a 'movement' through all of these interpretive gestures. Hawley's article provides an updated impetus for the scholarly investigation of who is saying what, when – and why – about bhakti.

Significance of the Study of Bhakti

The major significance of the study of bhakti for understanding Hinduism and religion in India more generally is that it provides a rationale for many voices to be expressed and to be heard. The popularizing impetus can be attributed to the shared understanding of bhakti as participation, as found in the *Gīta*, in which the protagonist is a warrior doing his hereditarily defined job; in the *purāṇa*s (mythological stories), which are permeated with bhakti;[68] and in guru traditions in Buddhism, Jainism, Hinduism and Sikhism, which define human relationships of love and loyalty. Bolstered by possibilities within these precedents as well as their own motivations, named individuals inscribed themselves in history by speaking of their own devotion, and by being remembered for doing so.

The diversity of voices across religious tradition (especially Hinduism and Sikhism), language, region, caste, class and gender can be readily observed in collections of scholarly articles on bhakti saints.[69] This diversity can also be seen across the poetry of individual or regional-language groups of saints in translation, such as Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, Bengali, Marathi and Hindi, as well as a collection of hymns by female poet–saints.[70] The saints presumed hearers: These translations allow the modern, English-speaking reader access to the saints' shared value of participatory devotion, while revealing distinctions in the saints' social and material concerns, their imaginations of God and their modes of expression.

Most poet–saints emphasized the 'mother tongue' for rendering bhakti in poetry, but it is important to realize that the significant presence of Sanskrit remained: within the words, phrases and structures of the regional languages; as a conscious mix with the regional language, such as the Sanskrit-Tamil *maṇipravāḷa* (*maṇi*, gemstone – Sanskrit; *pravāḷa*, coral – Tamil);[71] as a language of commentary; and as a language of composition, including the *Bhakti Sūtras* discussed earlier as well as beloved bhakti classics such as Jayadeva's *Gītagovinda* and the *Rasa Līlā*, on Krishna's dance with the cowherd girls from the *Bhagavāta Purāṇa*; and the influential sixteenth-century treatise on bhakti, *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu*, by Rūpa Gosvāmīn.[72] Still, the direction was in two ways: the Marathi saints Jñāneśwar (thirteenth century) wrote a Marathi commentary

on the *Bhagavad Gītā* called the *Jñāneśwari*, and Eknāth (sixteenth century) wrote a Marathi commentary on chapter 11 of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Vālmīki's Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa* epic was rendered into regional-languages and infused with bhakti, for example, Tulsidās' (sixteenth century) Hindi *Rāmacaritamānas* and Kampaṉ's (twelfth century) Tamil *Irāmāvatāram*.

That the saints were remembered, and thus their words were preserved, is an important factor. Given bhakti's emphasis on embodiment, it is not surprising that many of these works of and for remembrance took the form of biographies that contextualized the saints' hymns. Collections of biographies in translation include a canonical volume containing the life stories of the Tamil Śiva-bhakti saints, and one on the Telugu Vīraśaiva saints.[73] Translations of important hagiographical materials, such as stories of the Tamil Viṣṇu-bhakti saints (the fourteenth-century *Kuruparamparāpirapāvam 6000* – '6000 Verses on the Glory of the Succession of the Gurus' – by Piṉpaḻakiya Perumāl Jīyar and the fifteenth-century *Divyasūrcaritam* – 'Characters of the Sacred Ones' – by Garuḍavāhana Paṇḍita),[74] and especially concerning the Hindi saints, would be welcome (besides Justin Abbot's 1927 translation of the *Bhaktalīlāmṛta* for Scottish Mission Industries). As Novetzke says of the famous Hindi hagiographical texts, biographical renderings offer a 'taste' of the saints:

> It is no surprise that many of these Hindu hagiographies are described as 'A Necklace of *Bhaktas*', or *Bhaktamāla*, as Nabhadas called his work, suggesting a 'chain of memory' as Danièle Hervieu-Léger has used the term, or 'The Nectar of the Play of the Sants', or *Santalīlāmṛta*, as Mahipati called one of his major compositions, suggesting a composition of 'textures' coalescing into a whole. These are splendidly circular compositions, like a necklace, a chain of events that oscillate between 'argument' and 'mystery', intended to impart an emotion, to give a listener (or reader) a 'taste' or a sense of the *sant*'s life on Earth.[75]

'Tasting' the saint, through poetry and biography, is an aptly embodied characterization of the way one might share in the saint's bhakti. Sharing is encouraged since bhakti leans towards inclusiveness. It is a voluntary, and not hereditary, association, which is significant in India with its caste identities. One of the important issues to note in reading the saints' poetry alongside the biographies about them is the degree to which the saints tell us about their lives – caste, gender, family, significant events – in comparison with the usually very full imaginative fleshing out of their lives in the biographies. In their poetry, the saints reached out to others in their vocal identification of what we should notice in ourselves, our social context, and God, and how we should act in response to them. They were usually not as interested in locating themselves in the who, what and where of social existence as the biographies were. Notably,

a critique of social location as determinative was explicitly expressed by 'untouchable' bhakti saints, who documented their oppression. However, since the oppression of dalits continued for centuries in spite of the bhakti saints' public critique, scholars have focused on the influence of medieval bhakti saints' compositions and biographies on dalits' twentieth-century political mobilization.[76]

The extent to which the biographies render the saints more accessible to us through their shared humanity or create distance in their relish of the saints' individuality is an open question; yet bhakti's thesis that embodiment with all of its challenges is the most valid and efficacious approach to the divine makes it inevitable that we will always view the saints through their bodies as traced by their biographies. That the biographies detailed differences among the saints set bhakti's inclusiveness in a social key: Celebrating such diversity, bhakti could claim to be more comprehensive than identities defined by caste or by esoteric practices. As such it provides an alternative history to orthodoxy and secrecy, which are defined by exclusivity. In the biographies, usually the saints face social trials nuanced by caste, family, gender, religion and politics, which they overcome by their participatory devotion. In the poetry, this surmounting of social definitions may take different forms. One prominent theme in some scholarship is that the saints' imaginings of God as either *nirguṇa* (`without attributes') or *saguṇa* ('with attributes') defines their perspective towards the world as either critique or acceptance, respectively. Sharma promotes the view that they are significant, attributing Kabīr's inclusiveness to his faith in the *nirguṇa* Rām, whom he cites by name only:

> Kabīr's arguments against the observance of caste distinctions also eminate from his Nirguṇa ideology. If the Ultimate Reality was all pervading and One, if the same Spirit resided in all, how could one accept the caste differences? The philosophical basis of Kabīr's universalism was also the same. If God was viewed as nirguṇa and impersonal, how could one accept the use of different names for Him? How could one make distinctions between Īśvara and Allāh, between Rāma and Rahīm and between Kṛishṇa and Karīm? If all men were made of the same stuff, how could there be any difference between a Brahmin and a Śūdra, and between a Hindu and a Muslim?[77]

I believe that this distinction has only limited applicability. Since bhakti encourages the individual perspective within the context of a shared commitment, it seems more apt to seek the rhythm rather than the pattern. For example, the female saint Mīrābāī often identifies her Lord as the 'Mountain Lifter', a form of Krishna known from the *purāṇa*s as the one who protected villagers from the wrath of Indra by raising Mount Govārdhan to shield them from the driving

rain the latter sent. And yet she makes it clear in her poetry that her love for Krishna challenges the social and familial norms of her social caste and husband's family: 'Life without Hari is no life, friend,/ And though my mother-in-law fights,/ my sister-in-law teases,/ the *rana* is angered,/ A guard is stationed on a stool outside,/ and a lock is mounted on the door/ How can I abandon the love I have loved in life after life?/ Mira's Lord is the clever Mountain Lifter:/ Why would I want anyone else?'[78] Note that Mīrābāī is a princess, and thus a member of the royal caste (*Kṣātriya*); this parallels Arjuna's membership in the same caste in the *Gītā*. Of course, for males and females in the royal caste there are different obligations. The key is that Arjuna, through Krishna's exposition of bhakti, is resolved to fight as per his hereditary duties (*dharma*), through the *Gītā*'s concept of *karmayoga* (action [karma] with discipline [yoga], meaning without regard to self-interest). In contrast, Mīrābāī is in love with the Mountain Lifter and neglects her husband, which upsets her spouse and in-laws, thus violating her *dharma* (in this case, *strī dharma*, the duties of women). This and other examples demonstrate that the *Gītā* was an important beginning but not the end of bhakti's interpretive trajectory, and that deriving patterns from the saints' imagination of God alone can be misleading.

The inclusivity of bhakti in practice should not be overstated: Tamil Śiva-bhakti saints spoke at times harshly about Buddhists and Jains; Kabīr castigated both Hindu and Muslim religious authorities; and bhakti groups are distinguished along sectarian lines. And yet the details of religious and social location both create divisions and affirm the possibility of a shared identity across such divisions. The voices of bhakti span many bodies, regions and genres, but the voices of the saints emphasize bhakti's own point of origination – the human heart. Bhakti's vitality is in its popular accessibility; it can be validly claimed as an identity by anyone.

New Directions in the Study of Bhakti

Today, scholars are expanding the representation of bhakti voices in English translation. Neelima Shukla-Bhatt has written a dissertation (2003) and an article (2007a) introducing the poet–saint Narasinha Mehtā (ca. 1414–1480 CE), who has been enormously popular in Gujarati religiosity for five centuries, to an English-speaking audience. Her article provides a critical discussion of this saint by locating his imagery of Krishna, his hagiography and his poetic compositions in terms of Gujarati traditions of Krishna. She positions him with respect to the lineage of bhakti saints from that area, noting that Narasinha predated the more famous poet–saints of Chaitanya and Vallabha (both, late fifteenth century), though he was not a leader of a bhakti sect as these figures were; his singularity is part of the reason he is well-remembered by current

devotees, while it also partially explains why he is not well-known in the West. Yet significantly, Narasinha's devotional lyricism, from phrases to tunes, had a profound influence on later saints, including Dayārām, Mīrābāī and Surdās. Exploring the nexus between elite and popular, Shukla-Bhatt precisely elucidates ways in which his compositions draw both on influential Sanskrit texts (the *Bhagavāta Purāṇa*, the *Gīta Govinda*) and on Gujarati folk songs, and she provides translations from Narasinha's poetry. Currently she is at work on a book-length study of this saint, *Footprints of Songs: The Religious and Cultural Legacy of Gujarati Saint-Poet Narasinha Mehtā*, which promises to be a comprehensive study addressing the private and public aesthetics of the saint and his extensive reception, from Gandhi to YouTube.

Two experienced scholars are translating the works of Tamil female bhakti saints. Archana Venkatesan has a new book, *The Secret Garden: Āṇṭāḷ's* Tiruppāvai *and* Nācciyār Tirumoḻi, in which she offers a fresh translation of the saint's hymns, as well as discussion of their literary, ritual, theological and performative dimensions. She includes in her discussion aspects of the commentary on the saint's hymns by the thirteenth-century theologian, Periyavāccāṉ Piḷḷai. My own work also concerns a new and complete translation of the poetry of a medieval Tamil female saint, Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār (ca. sixth century), in my forthcoming book, *Interpreting Devotion: The Poetry and Legacy of a Classical Female Bhakti Saint of India*. This book explores interpreting the saint from a variety of perspectives, including modern scholarly, the saint's own interpretive stance in her poetic works, that of her medieval biographer in imagining her life story and festival performance interpretations of her life and its significance in the present day.

George Pati is introducing English speakers to a modern bhakti exponent from Kerala, Kumāran Āśān (1873–1924), providing a representation of bhakti in a language (Malayalam) and a region not previously explored in scholarship. He has a dissertation (2003) and a forthcoming translation of Kumāran Āśān's 'Śivasurabhi'. Pati's book-length manuscript on this author, *Poetry as Social Discourse in Colonial Kerala: Malayalam Text, Devotional Hermeneutics*, significantly addresses the issue of the possibilities that bhakti can change caste-defined society that were unresolved in medieval times. He explicitly links Kumāran Āśān's vision to social change, bringing in both subaltern studies and liberation theology as methodological tools:

> From his personal oppression by the caste system as a low-caste man, the poet developed his quest for liberation into an expansive vision of a just society. While other bhakti traditions' critiques of caste in medieval times were not lasting, Āśān's caste critique in his poems had lasting effects through the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP) movement in Kerala in modern times. This study analyzes the connections between

> these transformations using current scholarly theory in both subaltern literary studies and theology towards identifying Kumāran Āśān's timely and gripping vision as a Hindu liberation theology.[79]

These critical scholarly translations all address the issue of what can be called the circulation of bhakti, including what the bhakti exponents said and how it has been received and transmitted. An important recent study that has theorized bhakti hymns' reception and transmission is Christian Novetzke's *Religion and Public Memory: A Cultural History of Saint Namdev in India* (2008). Revising earlier ideas of a 'bhakti movement', Novetzke instead emphasizes memory in the circulation of expressions of bhakti: 'The increasing circumference of memory is perhaps what leads scholars in the nineteenth century to perceive a "*bhakti* movement" where what we have indisputably is a thriving *bhakti* public memory, localized, but connected to other locales.'[80] Memory is the key to creating a public for bhakti, and while it overlaps with history, it has its own mode: 'Memory, like anything else, may succumb to powerful forces (economic, colonial, social, etc.), but, unlike history, it does not depend on these powerful forces to sustain itself. Its archive is public sentiment and its text is human memorial interaction."[81] Emphasizing the theme of corporate authorship, Novetzke discusses the memory of saint Namdev as it is constituted through hagiography (including suppressed stories), performance of his hymns, nationalist discourses and film.

Present-day contestations over the meanings and significance of bhakti as it is deployed to define national identity are theorized by Milind Wakankar (2002, 2003, 2010), who compellingly argues that medieval bhakti voices became appropriated as a canonical representation of 'the popular' in Hindi nationalist writings of the early twentieth century, and that this discourse's erasure of caste, among other key features, was challenged by Dalit interpreters' redefinition of bhakti voices, especially Kabir's, later in the twentieth century.

Several ethnographic studies have sought to understand contemporary interpretations of Mīrābāī among ordinary people. Parita Mukta (1994) explored the villages of Rajasthan and the singing of songs in Mīrā's name by low-caste villagers. Nancy K. Martin (1996) portrays several women who embody Mīrā, analysing their leadership and life stories. Shukla-Bhatt (2007a) views the presence of Hindi, Gujarati and Rajasthani words in bhakti songs attributed to Mīrā as markers of communities' participation in her worship:

> When a bhajan becomes popular through such communal performances, it is integrated by a community into its own bhakti culture. The process is something like what happens when a family opens a gift that has arrived from a friend and finds a place for it in its home. Such translation is about

creating – perhaps recreating – a religious/cultural meaning that can be incorporated into one's own cultural milieu.[82]

These studies describe and theorize the presence and parameters of bhakti today among ordinary people.

Bhakti's presence in the arts is a prominent theme in scholarship today, in keeping with bhakti's emphasis on embodiment; indeed, bhakti is popularly known as the 'ninth *rasa*', or aesthetic sentiment that is rendered in performance. Studies include bhakti and drama, poetics, literary aesthetics, the performance of song and dance and ritual.[83]

An intriguing new direction in the study of bhakti's popularity, highlighting its extensive contemporary currency that other deeply rooted traditions do not necessarily share, is Jacob Copeman's (2009) study of contemporary gurus' successful urging of their devotees to donate blood to national agencies; such donation is considered to be devotional service (*seva*) to the guru.

Bhakti to the goddess is an important direction in the study of bhakti, and a necessary corrective to the predominant representation of bhakti as devotion to male gods (primarily Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa-Ram, but increasingly Śiva). Rachel Fell McDermott's studies of Kālī (2001a and b) and Constantina Rhodes' new volume on Lakṣmī are welcome contributions to this area. A related direction would be to theorize the relationship between bhakti and tantra, building on an earlier volume by Rhodes on Kashmiri Sanskrit hymns to Śiva (Bailly 1987).

The relationships between bhakti and Islam deserve to be further explored. Through his analysis of the Kṛṣṇaite devotional community known as the Puṣṭimārg, Shandip Saha (2007) urges scholars to look beyond the literary to see the material conditions of bhakti's generation and growth, including its patronage by the Mughal court. The late Aditya Behl (2007) argued that the relationship between bhakti and Ṣūfism has been overlooked by scholars. He pointed to the 'continuity' between the two traditions by comparing a description of a magic deer in the *Mirigāvatī* of Shaikh Quṭban, composed in 1503, and a similar image in Tulsīdās' (1532–1623) *Rāmacaritamānasa*; as well as the image of a holy lake in Malik Muḥammad Jāyasī's *Padmāvat*, which predates Tulsīdās' use of a similar image. Behl challenged scholars to recognize the implications of such continuities for the origin of bhakti.[84]

As these marvelous studies demonstrate, both the praxis and study of bhakti are vibrant fields today. My recommended directions for the future of bhakti studies include theorizing the inclusiveness of bhakti, especially as it pertains to Dalits and women; analysing bhakti as a motivation for artistic performance and the specificity of its gestures; translating bhakti works; defining circulations in the creation and transmission of bhakti literature and song; exploring the currency of bhakti in diverse social fields today; representing bhakti to the

Goddess and theorizing the relationships between bhakti and tantra; and critically analysing the interconnections of bhakti among Buddhism, Jainism, Hinduism, Islam, Ṣūfism and Sikhism in history and today.

Tantric Traditions

Dominic Goodall and Harunaga Isaacson

Starting from about the sixth century of the common era,[85] initiatory religions, claiming authority for scriptures called Tantras, and promising liberation as well as various worldly and supernatural goals through the power of mantras, came to the fore in South Asia. That these Tantric traditions were not marginal can be seen not just from the huge quantity of textual material that their followers produced, but also for instance from the importance which Tantric gurus played in the life of kings and of the court (cf. Sanderson, 2005). Nor did they remain confined to the subcontinent; as Sanderson has also recently emphasized (2004), among the Indian religious traditions that spread across Indonesia and the South-East Asian peninsula, it was particularly the Tantric forms of Buddhism and of the theistic schools of Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism that predominated. In East Asia, Tantric forms of Buddhism grew in popularity not long after their appearance in India; in Japan at least they continue till today to hold their own next to non-Tantric Mahāyāna. In Tibetan Buddhism, of course, it is the Tantric that is completely predominant.

But much of the literature of these influential religious traditions was relatively long neglected by scholarship, and at the beginning of the twentieth century the corpus of Tantras and associated compositions was virtually unknown. Starting in 1911, the Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies (KSTS) began gradually to unveil to scholars a number of Śaiva Tantric works that had been transmitted in Kashmir, particularly philosophical works composed in the Kashmir valley between the eighth and thirteenth centuries. But the scriptures of the Tantric current that appears in this period have dominated the Śaiva religion across most of the Indian subcontinent and beyond, namely the Śaivasiddhānta, remained relatively neglected.

A century later, Tantric Studies is now a rapidly emerging field; of no other area of Indian religions has our knowledge changed as much over the last fifty years or so. This blossoming has been possible in the first place because vast quantities of source material, especially hitherto unpublished texts, have been becoming gradually more easily available.

In recent centuries, the Tamil-speaking south is the only area where a vast corpus of Sanskrit texts of the Śaivasiddhānta has continued being copied and so

transmitted to the present day. When, therefore, in 1956 Jean Filliozat secured a foothold there, in Pondicherry, for French Indological research, he created an ideal institutional base for setting about the study of a forgotten chapter in the religious history of Asia. Gradually, the largest specialized manuscript collection of texts relating to the Śaivasiddhānta was amassed in the French Institute of Pondicherry (IFP), now recognized (2005) by UNESCO as a 'Memory of the World' collection (entitled 'The Śaiva Manuscripts of Pondicherry').[86]

At the other end of the subcontinent, the cool climate of Nepal has preserved ancient manuscripts of texts of virtually every branch of Indian learning, even those which have not been actively studied and transmitted in recent centuries. Much of the early history of tantrism – Śaiva, Buddhist and Vaiṣṇava – is thus preserved in the vast archive of Nepalese manuscripts microfilmed over more than three decades by the Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project (NGMPP). The latter project has ended, but has given place to the Nepalese-German Manuscript Cataloguing Project (NGMCP), run from Hamburg and from the NGMCP's base in Kathmandu, the Nepal Research Centre (NRC), under the direction of Harunaga Isaacson.

The scholarly study of Vaiṣṇava Tantric material began in the early years of the twentieth century (Schrader, 1916) and a handy survey of extant sources was prepared by Daniel Smith, (1975–1980). But Diwakar Acharya has recently discovered hitherto unknown materials that are evidently earlier than the canonical sources studied to date and these give a rather different picture of the origins of the Pāñcarātra, in particular because of the close dependence on Śaiva models they reveal.

The same scholar has also uncovered what appears to be a sole surviving solar Tantra, a scripture teaching a religion centred round the worship of the Sun, though this work, the *Saurasaṃhitā*, rather than being one of the canon of solar scriptures (of which a list is preserved in Takṣakavarta's *Nityādisaṃgraha*, edited in Hanneder, 1998, pp. 246–7), presents itself as a recension of the Śaiva *Kālottara*, and indeed, as Diwakar Acharya has noticed, has many formulations that are calqued upon the *Kālottara* (see also Sanderson, 2009, pp. 55–6).

Although Buddhist Tantra is not the subject of this article, the Tantric traditions are so closely related, indeed intimately interwoven, that it will inevitably be necessary to refer to Buddhist traditions at several places below. Here too the amount of primary material available has grown exponentially, especially since the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies in Sarnath took up the task of publishing Buddhist Tantric texts with great energy in the mid-1980s. Japanese scholars, of whom in the period with which this overview deals Toru Tomabechi has been perhaps the most prominent (see for example Tomabechi and Mimaki, 1994; Tomabechi, 2007; Tomabechi, 2008; Tomabechi, 2009; Luo and Tomabechi, 2009), have also made numerous contributions, both through editions and through the publication of studies, so that this area of scholarship can be said to

have flourished in parallel (surely not coincidentally) with the blooming of studies of Tantric Hinduism.

Of course the availability of plentiful primary material alone cannot lead to progress. The advances that have been made are due above all to individuals who took on the daunting task of reading and trying to make sense of as yet unstudied and often very difficult texts. Tantric Studies today would be completely different, certainly would have made far less progress, and might well not be on the scholarly radar (and included in a volume such as this one) at all, had it not been for the accidents that brought Hélène Brunner to take up, with unwavering purpose, the study of the Śaivasiddhānta, and those which led Alexis Sanderson to study the Tantric traditions with unparalleled depth and breadth.[87] The latter has had a tremendous impact also through teaching, with more than a dozen doctoral theses having been prepared under his supervision, many of which are important contributions (several monographs referred to in this article originated as such theses).

Some of the research that has thrown most light on the origins of Tantric Śaivism has not been primarily about tantrism proper (the Mantramārga, or 'way of mantras'), but about the non-Tantric Pāśupata religions from which the Mantramārga sprung: the Atimārga. The most substantial contribution in this area is an article of Sanderson that appeared in 2006 under the title 'The Lākulas: New Evidence of a System Intermediate between Pāñcārthika Pāśupatism and Āgamic Śaivism'. For it is in this article that it is demonstrated that there is a remarkable doctrinal continuity, particularly in the cosmographic conceptions that are set to work in the context of religious initiation, between the Atimārga and what is arguably the earliest known Śaiva Tantra (about which more below). Other recent articles have furnished inscriptional evidence of Atimārga schools that can be married with what we now know about their cosmography (Bakker, 2000), or revealed continuities between the Atimārga and the Mantramārga in the ritual domain (Acharya, 2005, 2007). The work of Peter Bisschop (2005 and 2007) has helped further to refine our understanding of the best known of the Atimārga traditions, that of the Pāñcārthika Pāśupatas.

We have spoken of 'continuity', but what characterizes the shift from Atimārga to the Mantramārga? How does the latter set itself apart? The new Tantric religion for the first time placed strong (perhaps equal) emphasis on two goals: liberation (*mukti*) and the enjoyment of supernatural powers (*bhukti*). Both goals were attained through the power of spells (*vidyā*, *mantra*), the propitiation and use of which required a ritual technology of considerable complexity and both required initiation (*dīkṣā*). Now there may seem to be nothing very new here: initiation is required for the Atimārga too, and indeed for Vedic sacrifices, while the use of mantras for magic is also not an innovation. And liberation, after all, is the goal of the Atimārga. But these elements have been reconfigured and, in some cases, reinterpreted: the spells of the Mantramārga

are with five exceptions (the five *brahmamantras*) not Vedic, and initiation (*dīkṣā*) is no longer simply a necessary rite of entrance into a new religion, as it had been for at least the Pāñcārthika Pāśupatas, but has become instead a transformative rite. Liberation is no longer brought about, as in the Atimārga, through a lengthy progression of post-initiatory practice, but is conceived of as being essentially the result of the cutting of bonds by Śiva, acting through the guru and with mantras as his instruments, at the time of initiation. Furthermore, this liberation, conceived of both as release from suffering and at the same time as the realization of omniscience and omnipotence, was offered not only to brahmin males, as in the Atimārga, but to those of all *varṇas* and, in some cases, to both sexes.

This combination of innovations may have been a factor in the powerful appeal which the Mantramārga evidently had, and in its ability to attract a wide base of followers.[88] A similar nexus of notions – *mantras* as both magical and soteriological instruments, to be wielded only by practitioners who have received a certain initiation (*abhiṣeka*) – seems to make its appearance slightly later in Buddhist sources than in Śaiva ones;[89] and the continuities which can be traced between the Mantramārga and the Atimārga, and often further back within the brahminical traditions, suggest to us that the Śaiva Tantric tradition was, at least in its origins, not influenced by Buddhist Tantra, though this does not preclude the possibility of influence on it in some respects at least of earlier non-Tantric forms of Buddhism. But the origins of these two traditions, and the manner in which they influenced each other as they grew, are matters of vigorous debate (see for example, Ruegg, 1964; Sanderson, 1994; Davidson, 2001; Sferra, 2003; Ruegg, 2008; Sanderson, 2009).

One text deserves special mention here, since it links together a number of the Tantric and non-Tantric traditions that we have discussed. This is the *Niśvāsatattvasaṃhitā*, of which what appears to be a ninth-century Nepalese manuscript survives. Various scholars have drawn attention to it in the past (Hara Prasad Śastri, 1905, p. lxxvii and pp. 137–40, Goudriaan and Gupta, 1981, pp. 33–6), and a critical edition is now well under way (see Goodall and Isaacson, 2007). The work, which is divided into five books that appear not all to have been written at the same time, contains first of all descriptions of two non-Tantric (and perhaps we may here say pre-Tantric) Atimārga religions that provide strong evidence of continuity between the Atimārga and the Mantramārga which the Niśvāsa preaches, particularly in the realm of the complex cosmography used in a salvific initiation (*nirvāṇadīkṣā* is the term used in the parts of the *Niśvāsa* that expound the Mantramārga). This continuity between pre-Tantric and Tantric Śaiva soteriology is the subject of an article of Sanderson's referred to above (2006). Secondly, the last (and probably the latest or second latest) of the five books, the *Guhyasūtra* provides evidence of common ground with the non-soteriological Tantric magic of Buddhist *kriyātantras*. For, like the

Mañjuśriyamūlakalpa, it contains a grimoire of recipes in prose for attaining magical *siddhis*. The recipes of both are couched in extremely similar language, with many identical elements identically phrased, and there is at least one entire recipe that is the same in almost every detail: an effigy made of salt (and smeared with blood, according to the *Niśvāsa*) is to be cut up into pieces and one thousand and eight oblations are to be performed,[90] after which one may control the person (of whom the effigy was made), whether it be a woman or a man.[91]

Another shared feature that recurs frequently in both sources is the notion that three levels of *siddhi* may be attained by following a given recipe, the level attained being heralded by the manifestation of heat, smoke or flames. A recipe given in *Guhyasūtra* 10.27ff., for instance, concludes: 'With oblation one thousand and eight times, power, which is of three [possible] grades, arises: if there is heat, power to cover great distances fast on foot [is attained]; if there is smoke, the power to disappear; if there are flames, the power to fly.'[92] These three levels of *siddhi* are also to be found in other Buddhist Tantric works, such as the *Amoghapāśakalparāja*, but the classification is extremely rare in Śaiva literature outside the *Niśvāsa*.[93]

So the *Niśvāsa* may be linked both to pre-Tantric Śaiva soteriology and to non-Śaiva non-soteriological Tantric magic found in Buddhist sources. It is also linked to some of the Tantric literature that was drawn on by Kashmirian exegetes of Śaiva non-dualism, for a large number of its verses, more than a thousand, were adopted and adapted to become part of the widely transmitted *Svacchandatantra* commented on by Abhinavagupta's disciple Kṣemarāja in the eleventh century, and the *Svacchandatantra* in turn was itself cannibalized in a similar fashion by another large esoteric Tantra, the *Tantrasadbhāva*, a text we will have occasion to mention again below. Once again, cosmography forms a considerable part of what was adopted, but *mantras* and yogic material have also migrated. The wide influence of the *Svacchandatantra*, a Bhairava-tantra of the southern stream (*dakṣiṇasrotas*), can be gauged also from its wide dissemination (plentiful manuscripts survive today from Kashmir, Nepal and the Tamil-speaking south) and the absorption of its ideas into many ritual manuals.

Furthermore, the *Niśvāsa* is an ancestor not only of such Tantras, but also of the relatively orthodox and Veda-congruent Śaivasiddhānta (whose scriptures some erroneously refer to as 'South Indian āgamas'). For although the work makes no reference to different schools within the Mantramārga, and therefore may well predate a split into Śaivasiddhānta, Dakṣiṇasrotas, etc., it includes what is probably the earliest surviving list of a canon of 28 scriptures (in which its own name features), now known as the canon of the 28 principal Siddhāntatantras. In other words, it came to be seen as belonging to the Śaivasiddhānta when that school came into existence.[94]

From the inclusions and omissions in this voluminous work, we can tease out a picture of an early stage of development of what appears, judging from

inscriptions and surviving literature, to have become by the tenth century the dominant strand of Tantric Śaivism in and beyond the Indian subcontinent. As might be expected, a certain social dimension of the Mantramārga appears to be missing: we find no reference here to monasteries, or to the hierarchy of initiates – *ācārya*, *sādhaka*, *putraka*, *samayin* – familiar from the seventh-century *Svāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgraha* onwards,[95] and no reference to distinctively Śaiva forms of life-passage rites. Even in later Śaivism, of course, the brahminical life-cycle rites continued to be observed as part of a required social religion, but distinctively Śaiva funerary rites soon developed,[96] and these too are missing in the *Niśvāsa*.[97]

The focus of the religion as presented by the *Niśvāsa* was already the performance of ritual initiation through the use of non-Vedic mantras for non-brahmins as well as for brahmins. The structure of initiation, however, is rather different from the 'classical' standard expounded in the eleventh-century *Somaśambhupaddhati* (expounded at length in Brunner, 1977): in the *Niśvāsa* we find repeated throughout the text instructions for a pair of initiations, namely *vidyādīkṣā* and *nirvāṇadīkṣā*, the former apparently qualifying the initiate for the cultivation of special powers (*sādhana*) through the mastery of spells (*vidyā*) and the latter for liberation (*nirvāṇa*). These are the familiar Tantric goals of *bhoga*/*bhukti* and *mokṣa*/*mukti*. In doctrine, there are some surprises: the problem of choosing between dualism (the solution of the classical Śaivasiddhānta) or non-dualism (the solution of the now more famous Kashmirian exegetes of the tenth and eleventh centuries, such as Abhinavagupta) appears not yet to have been formulated, and the notion of an innate impurity (*mala*, *āṇava-mala*) that condemns every soul to bondage in *saṃsāra*, a notion ubiquitous in other Śaiva Tantric literature, is nowhere mentioned in the *Niśvāsa*. It had apparently not yet been conceived. The description of the cosmos in terms of thirty-six constitutive principles of increasing subtlety (*tattva*), which similarly is sometimes thought of as a defining feature of Tantric Śaivism, had not yet evolved, and we can see it begin to do so in the course of the redaction of the *Niśvāsa*.[98]

Attempts to understand the *Niśvāsa* and its significance build, of course, on the work of many other scholars, in particular of Alexis Sanderson and of those scholars who were attached to the Pondicherry Centre of the École Française d'Extrême-Orient and the French Institute of Pondicherry and who were pioneers in the study of the Śaivasiddhānta, such as Jean and Pierre-Sylvain Filliozat, N. R. Bhatt and his team, Bruno Dagens and Hélène Brunner-Lachaux. They produced numerous first editions of Śaiva works and, in the case of the last mentioned, an invaluable body of annotation, of gradually increasing sophistication and complexity, to the best known and most widely transmitted Śaiva Tantric manual, the *Somaśambhupaddhati* (Brunner, 1963, 1968, 1977, 1998). When work began on the Śaivasiddhānta in Pondicherry, it seems to have been generally assumed that the corpus of literature studied was South Indian and that the

'Āgamas of the South' formed a corpus quite distinct from the 'Tantras of the North'. Even Somaśambhu, pontiff of a monastery between the Narmadā and the Ganges (Brunner, 1998, p. xliv), was at first supposed to be a southerner. But Brunner was constantly re-examining her ideas, and she came gradually to realize how close some 'Northern Tantras', such as the *Svacchandatantra* and *Netratantra*, in fact were to the corpus on which she was principally focused. It now seems clear that early Saiddhāntika scriptures are very much part of the Śaiva Tantric corpus and none of them has been proven to be southern.

There is however a distinct South Indian body of what may be called 'Śaiva Temple Āgamas' which probably began to be composed in the twelfth century. These include the surviving works that bear the titles *Kāmika*, *Kāraṇa*, *Ajita*, *Suprabheda*, *Dīpta* and *Sūkṣma*. Unlike the earlier scriptures, none of these are transmitted in Nepalese or Kashmirian manuscripts, and none are identifiably quoted by twelfth- and pre-twelfth-century authors.[99] Whereas earlier Siddhāntatantras have as their principal themes the attainment of liberation through initiation and the subjects that individual initiates need to know or to practise (theology, yoga, regular worship and other rituals), this new body of Temple Āgamas attempted to prescribe every detail of life in a South Indian Śaiva temple.[100] A distinction between Tantras and these particular South Indian Temple Āgamas does therefore make some sense. In their subject-matter, and therefore quite palpably in their vocabulary, these Śaiva South Indian Temple Āgamas have arguably less in common with such pre-tenth-century Siddhāntatantras as the *Kiraṇa*, *Mataṅga*, *Parākhya* and *Mṛgendra* than they have with Vaiṣṇava South Indian Temple Āgamas of comparable date, in other words, such Pāñcarātra scriptures as the *Pauṣkarasaṃhitā*, *Pārameśvarasaṃhitā* and *Īśvarasaṃhitā*.[101]

For those interested in the dissemination of Indian religious aesthetics and ideas to South-East Asia, therefore, this South Indian corpus is unlikely to be of direct relevance: it is simply too late and too plainly regionally specific. And so it is rather to the scriptures transmitted in early Nepalese manuscripts (and often also in southern sources too) that we should now turn, such as the *Sarvajñānottara* and the above-mentioned *Niśvāsa*, to have an idea of what might have been transmitted 'abroad'. Both those works, since they are actually mentioned by name in Cambodian inscriptions (Sanderson, 2001, pp. 22–3, fn. 28 and pp. 7–8, fn. 5), are a promising starting point, and editions of both are underway, the *Sarvajñānottara* being edited by Dominic Goodall with a twelfth-century commentary by the South Indian theologian Aghoraśiva (fl. 1157 AD).

What we should like to see in the coming years would be editions of some of the temple-related scriptures surviving in Nepalese palm-leaf manuscripts, in other word the *pratiṣṭhātantras* such as the *Piṅgalāmata*, the *Mayasaṅgraha*, the *Mohacūḍottara* and the *Devyāmata*.[102] These are plainly pre-twelfth-century and not South Indian, but when they were written and where they come from

remains to be discovered by study. Our understanding of iconography has for too long depended too much on the same largely post-twelfth-century South Indian materials used by Rao in his (at the time pioneering) *Elements of Hindu Iconography* (1914). Efforts to link earlier Saiddhāntika literature with South Indian temple sculpture (notably, Goodall et al., 2005 and Goodall, 2009) have so far tended to confirm Brunner's conclusion (1990, p. 28), that there is remarkably little overlap between the divinities which Saiddhāntika accounts of *pūjā* or *pratiṣṭhā* would lead us to expect to find installed in any given temple and the sculptures that we actually see. Advances have been made, however, particularly in more esoteric Tantric iconography, by Bühnemann (e.g. 2000, 2001 and 2003).

Another body of text that seems certain to reward exploration is that formed by the many surviving recensions of the *Kālottara*. This work seems to have had a particularly large influence in the development of Tantric ritual: as Sanderson has shown (2004, p. 358), the still unpublished 200-verse recension served as the core for all the surviving Saiddhāntika *paddhatis* with one exception, and it is possible that the unpublished 6,000-verse recension, first cited by twelfth-century authors, served as a vehicle for the importation of non-Saiddhāntika ideas into the *paddhati*-tradition, since it was itself a conflated document (see, for instance, Sanderson, 2001, pp. 38–41) and yet was regarded as being of the same family of scriptural revelation as the 200-verse recension.

Turning from the Siddhānta, there is one other current of Śaiva Tantras which might rival even the *Niśvāsa* in its antiquity. This is that of the Vāmatantras, teaching the cult of a form of Śiva called Tumburu, accompanied by his four sisters. Sanderson (2009, pp. 50–1 and p. 129 n. 301) has recently discussed in some detail the evidence, which is plentiful, that shows that this tradition must be early and must once have been of great influence. The only scripture belonging to this current that appears to be extant today is the *Vīṇāśikhātantra*, yet another treasure that has been preserved to us (in a single palm-leaf manuscript, of which there is also a recent apograph) in Nepal. The edition and translation by Goudriaan of this work (1985) was thus an extremely valuable contribution.[103] If there is one Tantra known to us that could be older than the *Niśvāsa*, this is probably it. An important recent discovery is that, made by Sanderson and Vasudeva (and reported in Sanderson, 2009, pp. 50–1, especially n. 22), of two folios of a learned non-scriptural work on the Tumburu cult, in Āryā metre, surviving among the famous (and almost entirely Buddhist) Gilgit manuscripts. Sanderson and Vāsudeva assign these folios on palaeographical grounds to 'around the middle of the sixth century' (Sanderson, 2009, p. 50). The publication of this fragment is keenly awaited, and we hope that some scholar will take up the task of producing a fresh study of what is known and what can be inferred about the Vāmatantras, reflecting advances in our knowledge since Goudriaan's pioneering work.[104]

The other main division of Śaiva scriptures is that of the Bhairavatantras. Research on these texts, in which ferocious deity forms and practice involving antinomian aspects predominate (in contrast with the generally mild deities and 'purer' practice of the Siddhāntas), and which include the more goddess-oriented Tantras, has also made great strides in the last thirty years.

The Trika, the tradition within which Abhinavagupta wrote his most celebrated works, has long attracted interest; but until rather recently, only one of its principal scriptures, the *Mālinīvijayottaratantra*, had been published (in the KSTS, edited by Madhusudan Kaul Śastri). In a path-breaking paper on 'The Doctrine of the Mālinīvijayottaratantra' Sanderson (1992) demonstrated that the Tantra which Abhinavagupta presents as the core-text of the Trika, and hence as the essence of the non-dualist Śaiva traditions is, on the contrary, clearly dualist. Even more recently, a re-edition of several chapters of the Tantra, accompanied by a detailed study, has made an important contribution to the study of Tantric Śaiva yoga (Vasudeva, 2004, a revised Oxford DPhil thesis).

One of the other principal Trika scriptures, the *Siddhayogeśvarīmata*, was the subject of another Oxford thesis (Törzsök, 1999) which still awaits publication, though some parts of her edition have already been made more widely available (Törzsök, 2000, 2006). The other major Trika scripture which has survived in Sanskrit, the *Tantrasadbhāvatantra*, has not yet been published in the usual manner, but an electronic transcription, said to have been 'partially and provisionally edited by Mark Dyczkowski', was one of the first of many extremely useful e-texts to be made available by the Muktabodha Digital Library. Thanks to this e-text, the *Tantrasadbhāvatantra* has begun to be drawn on more extensively by students of Śaivism; but a critical edition and study of (any part of) this large scripture remains a very urgent desideratum.[105]

The principal non-scriptural work that may be assigned to the Trika is Abhinavagupta's *Tantrāloka*, a huge and highly sophisticated work which has fascinated, but also baffled, several generations of scholars since its publication by Madhusūdan Kaul Shāstrī, between 1918 and 1938. The only complete translation is still that of Gnoli, a thoroughly revised second edition of which was published in 1999 (the first edition appeared in 1972). Other recent studies of parts of the *Tantrāloka* that merit mention here are the translations of Chapters 1–5 by Silburn/Padoux (1998) and of the famous twenty-ninth chapter, on Kaula ritual, by Dupuche (2003). These works are certainly useful, especially for those not yet able to take on the challenge of studying the *Tantrāloka* independently; but we think that it is high time for an entirely fresh treatment of Abhinavagupta's masterpiece – one which does not rely solely on the KSTS edition, laudable pioneering attempt though it is, but makes use of the plentiful manuscript material that is available, some of which was not at the disposal of the editor and his assistants.[106] As an example of what might be possible, and of how

rewarding a more thorough-going unpacking of the richness of Abhinavagupta's writing is, we can refer to Sanderson's remarkable commentary (2005b), covering 60 pages, on the three opening verses of the *Tantrasāra*.

Outside the Trika, but still within the larger area of the Bhairavatantras, the *Picumata Brahmayāmala* is an early work whose importance is becoming more clear. In his brilliant overview of the Śaiva traditions, Sanderson (1988, p. 672) had already drawn attention to this Tantra as exemplifying 'the first level of the ascent of Śakti to autonomy'. The first dedicated book-length study of the work, including an edition and translation of several chapters, is Hatley, 2007*; this doctoral thesis is as yet unpublished but has already begun to be used and cited by many scholars working in the field.[107] In spite of its strongly transgressive character, combining the mortuary paraphernalia of Kāpālikas with sexual ritual and a use of sexual fluids reminiscent of the Kaulas, and a scatological preoccupation that is perhaps uniquely its own, the *Brahmayāmala*, which Hatley dates cautiously to 'the sixth to eighth centuries' (2007*, p. 211), was no minor or marginal text. This may be seen from the fact that it is one of the Śaiva Tantras which has been drawn on in the redaction of some Buddhist Tantras,[108] from its importance, although not a Trika Tantra, to Abhinavagupta,[109] and, one might perhaps argue, from a striking similarity (in matters which range from details of magical ritual to shared linguistic abnormalities) to the *Niśvāsatattvasaṃhitā* and to some early Buddhist Tantric material. Studies of the *Brahmayāmala* by Hatley and by Csaba Kiss, some in the context of the 'Early Tantra' project (see below), continue and are awaited eagerly.

A Bhairavatantra tradition which has received rather more attention than others in the last thirty years is that of the so-called 'Western Transmission' (*paścimāmnāya*). Somewhat at random, it seems, the Tantras of this tradition were selected as a research topic by a team of scholars at the Instituut voor Oosterse Talen of the State University at Utrecht in 1972. Decades of patient study, mainly of Nepalese manuscripts filmed by the NGMPP, led to several significant publications, among which should be mentioned in particular the edition of the first six chapters of the *Ṣaṭsāhasrasaṃhitā* (Schoterman, 1982) and the edition of the entire *Kubjikāmatatantra* (Goudriaan and Schoterman, 1988), the latter with a detailed, useful discussion of the non-standard Sanskrit of the Tantra. The mantle of Goudriaan and Schoterman was taken up, for a while at least, by Doris Heilijgers-Seelen, whose study of the system of five cakras (Heilijgers-Seelen, 1994), including a revision of the text as edited in Goudriaan and Schoterman, 1988 and an annotated translation, was a step towards a better understanding of an important section of the *Kubjikāmatatantra*. That mantle can perhaps now be said to have passed from the Dutch to Mark Dyczkowski, who followed a survey of the canonical literature of the *paścimāmnāya* (1988) almost two decades later with what is probably the largest single edition and annotated translation of a Tantra – the *Kumārikākhaṇḍa*, one of three *khaṇḍas*

making up the *Manthānabhairava* – ever to have been completed. This last is certainly a staggering achievement, even if the doubts raised by Sanderson (2002, apropos of Goudriaan and Schoterman, 1988) as to the advisability of singling out from the mass of unpublished Tantras the *Kubjikāmatatantra*, rather than one of the earlier and more fundamental scriptures on which it draws, seem to be even more relevant for the *Manthānabhairava*. Nonetheless, the importance of the *paścimāmnāya* in Nepal, which is reflected in the exceptionally large number of manuscripts of the texts pertaining to this tradition preserved there, and which arguably continues to the present (or very nearly), is such that the student of Hindu Tantrism certainly cannot complain about the fact that a relatively large amount of progress has been made in editing this literature.

Even more famous than the Kubjikā cult of the *paścimāmnāya*, and still widespread and vigorous today, is the Śrīvidyā, the system of worship of the goddess Tripurasundarī, which Sanderson (1995, p. 47) has called 'the most influential and widespread of the Tantric traditions in medieval and modern India'. Present-day practice falls outside the scope of our survey; but this system has a long history too. Given Śrīvidyā's popularity, that history has not been entirely neglected, but we feel that a fresh, detailed, historically sensitive study is still a desideratum. Important contributions, once again, have been made by Alexis Sanderson, though he has devoted only relatively few pages to this topic (see especially, Sanderson, 2007a, pp. 383–5, and Sanderson, 2009, pp. 47–49). Useful recent translations and studies of individual texts of this tradition include that of the *Yoginīhṛdaya* and the commentary *Dīpikā* thereon by Amṛtānanda by Padoux (1994), and that of the *Paraśurāmakalpasūtra* by Weber (2010); a translation of the *Vāmakeśvarīmata* together with the commentary thereon by Jayaratha has been offered by Finn (1986; the caution expressed in Brunner, 1992 should be noted).

Yet another important tradition, that of the Tantras of Kālī/Kālasaṃkarṣiṇī, still awaits more extensive attention. The largest of this group of Tantras, and indeed, apparently the largest surviving Tantric scripture of any tradition, the *Jayadrathayāmala* (in four *Ṣaṭkas*, each of about 6,000 verses), has been drawn on regularly by Sanderson, since his earliest publications; in an appendix to Sanderson, 2005, as a part of an investigation into the provenance of the *Netratantra*, evidence is presented for the second, third and fourth *Ṣaṭkas* being Kashmirian. Olga Serbaeva-Saraogi has also studied the *Jayadrathayāmala*, especially in her as yet unpublished doctoral thesis (2006). Preliminary electronic editions of some of the smaller Tantras of this cult, such as the *Kramasadbhāva* and the *Devīdvyardhaśataka*, have been made available by Mark Dyczkowski through the Muktabodha Digital Library; but there is a great deal of basic work remaining to be done in this area.

Several of the books mentioned already are studies chiefly of Śaiva Tantric yoga (Vasudeva, 2004, Heilijgers-Seelen, 1994). This is a vast area which certainly demands much further study. Work by Mallinson (2007) and by Kiss (2009) has done much to clarify the relation between Tantric yoga and *haṭhayoga*, and the emergence of the latter. An attempt at a wide-ranging history of Tantric yoga has recently been made by White (2009), but his provocative thesis – that its original and fundamental character is that of a practice in which the yogin exits his own body and may enter that of another – seems to us to be based on a rather selective and one-sided reading of sources. Flood (2006) also gives an ambitious treatment of Tantric practices related to the body, placing much emphasis on the notion of entextualization, which he owes to anthropology; but an attempt of this sort to move beyond Indology to a 'post-foundational understanding of text as infinitely interpretable' (p. 16) seems perhaps premature, when foundations are still so weak.

Advances have been considerable in the study of the more philosophical writings. Once again, much more primary material has been made available, most importantly perhaps, numerous commentaries of the two most significant systematizers of the dualist theology of the mature Śaivasiddhānta, namely Sadyojyotiḥ, whose commentary on the *Svāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgraha* (Filliozat, 1994) may be the earliest surviving prose commentary on a Tantric work (for his seventh- to eighth-century date, see Sanderson, 2006b), and the Kashmirian Rāmakaṇṭha, a contemporary of Abhinavagupta who exercised a formative influence over twelfth-century South Indian exegetes such as *Aghoraśiva*. Commentaries of his on more philosophical works (*Nareśvaraparīkṣā* and *Mokṣakārikā*) were known from the first half of the twentieth century, but not those on the *Sārdhatriśatikālottara* (edited in Bhatt, 1979), *Mataṅgapārameśvara* (ed. Bhatt, 1977, 1982), *Kiraṇatantra* (edited and translated in Goodall 1998) and *Tattvatrayanirṇayavivṛti* (edited and translated in Goodall, Kataoka, Acharya and Yokochi, 2008). A philologically solid study of Rāmakaṇṭha's philosophy, Watson, 2006, focusing on his response to Buddhist attacks upon the notion of the 'self', may go some way towards establishing the reputation of the greatest of the Saiddhāntika theologians as an original thinker.

The non-dualist philosophical tradition has been the focus of scholarly interest for much longer than the literature discussed up to this point in part. This is because of the intellectual magnetism of Abhinavagupta, and in part because Utpaladeva's aesthetically appealing 'doctrine of recognition', expounded in the *Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikā* and in the voluminous commentarial literature upon it, can be read as a philosophical system independent of the Tantric scriptures (long regarded as less respectable and less worthy of study) from which it drew inspiration and authority. We may mention only a few major recent publications in this area: Hanneder, 1998, a series of important

studies of Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta by Torella (2002, 2004, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2007d), and several articles of Isabelle Ratié that are among the best publications on the Pratyabhijñā (2007a, 2007b, 2009, 2010). A new critical edition by John Nemec of the seminal work of this tradition, Somānanda's *Śivadṛṣṭi*, has been announced as forthcoming soon (extensively revised from Nemec, 2005, an unpublished doctoral dissertation in which the first two chapters of Somānanda's work had been edited and translated).

The Pāñcarātra, openly more orthodox and Veda-congruent, has also escaped being thought of as suspect because of being 'Tantric', and so editions, translations and scholarly studies of this Vaiṣṇava tradition were published much earlier, and often from research institutions in different parts of India (rather than from religious societies, such as the Devakottai-based Śaivasiddhāntaparipālanasaṅgha, which produced the majority of publications of the Śaivasiddhānta before the advent of the French research institutions in Pondicherry). Thus the Adyar Library and Research Centre published the *Ahirbudhnyasaṃhitā* in 1916 (revised edition: Krishnamacharya, 1966); the *Lakṣmītantra* in 1959 (Krishnamacharya, 1959), of which a translation appeared just over a decade later (Gupta, 1972); and the *Sanatkumārasaṃhitā* in 1969 (Krishnamacharya 1969). The *Viṣṇusaṃhitā* appeared in the Trivandrum Sanskrit Series in 1925 (Ganapati Śastri, 1925); and the *Jayākhyasaṃhitā* appeared in the Gaekwad's Oriental Series in Baroda in 1931 (Krishnamacharya, 1931). (This is of course by no means a comprehensive list.) Recent book-length studies focusing on particular *saṃhitās* include Matsubara, 1994; Rastelli, 1999 and 2006; Bock-Raming, 2002; Czerniak-Drożdżowicz, 2003, and a short *paddhati* claiming to be based on the *Pādma*[*-saṃhitā*] appears as an appendix to *Tripathi*, 2004. None of these take into account the eagerly awaited publication of scriptures discovered in early Nepalese manuscripts by Diwakar Acharya, which we have alluded to above.

Philosophical works of the Pāñcarātra, too, have not been neglected. A long series of publications authored or edited by Oberhammer over the past decade and a half have explored various aspects of the relationship between the Pāñcarātra and the Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta tradition; suffice it to mention here the papers collected in Oberhammer (2002) and in Oberhammer and Rastelli, 2007. The sophisticated apology for the Pāñcarātra scriptures by Yāmuna in his *Āgamaprāmāṇya* has been studied by Mesquita (e.g. 1980), and, together with the arguments put forward for the same purpose by Veṅkaṭanātha in his *Pāñcarātrarakṣā*, by Rastelli (2008). These authors are southern; in Kashmir we have evidence of a Pāñcarātra with a different doctrinal slant. The most remarkable work of this tradition is a non-dualist hymn to Viṣṇu by Vāmanadatta, rooted in the tradition of the *Sātvatasaṃhitā*,[110] but often quoted with approval by Kashmirian Śaiva authors (particularly non-dualists) as well as by Pāñcarātrikas. This hymn, referred to commonly in secondary literature as the

Saṃvitprakāśa,[111] is being studied by Torella (1994), who has promised a critical edition and English translation.

Finally, a word or two about the minor Śaiva or Śaivised traditions. We have alluded above to the discovery of a surviving solar (or rather Śaiva-solar) scripture: the *Saurasaṃhitā*, but have not yet mentioned the Bhūtatantras and Gāruḍatantras, that is to say the exorcistic scriptures and those related to snake poison. These must once have been of considerable importance – for one thing, each of these branches of Śaiva scriptures is assigned to one of the five faces of Sadāśiva in a very widespread conceptual scheme (see for example Hanneder, 1998, 17ff. and 195ff.) – but have hitherto been almost entirely neglected in modern scholarship. Michael Slouber's research (2007 and http://www.garudam.com/page/Home.html) has however begun to explore what survives of this material, while at the same time combining the careful study of textual material with the exploration of the evidence of related contemporary practices in a way that promises to be more fruitful (because more soundly grounded) than most attempts at inter-disciplinary approaches to Tantra have proved.

General surveys must be tentative while the flood of texts being published continues to wash around us. The growth of electronically searchable e-texts certainly helps – the riches that can be downloaded free from the websites of the Göttingen Register of Electronic Texts in Indic Languages, from the Muktabodha Indological Research Institute, from the French Institute of Pondicherry and from the Centre for Tantra Studies have changed the way most scholars study – but caution is required, for 'grepping' is no substitute for reading, and e-texts, with some laudable exceptions, tend to have many more errors than printed editions.

Among such surveys, mention should perhaps first be made of a short encyclopaedia article with the ambitious (though absolutely fitting) title 'Śaivism and the Tantric Traditions' (Sanderson, 1988), which gives a magisterial, if tantalizingly brief (and unannotated), overview of one important part of our subject based to a large extent on primary material which was then unpublished (as a good part remains till today). Among general accounts of 'Hinduism', Gavin Flood's (1996) stands out as one that attempts to give the Tantric traditions their due and is much more than usually up-to-date and well informed on them. The Wiesbaden series *A History of Indian Literature* contains two volumes that cover two overlapping sections of our field: *Hindu Tantric and Śākta Literature* (Goudriaan and Gupta, 1981) and *Medieval Religious Literature in Sanskrit* (Gonda, 1977). The latter is intended to include both the Pāñcarātra and the '*Āgamas*' of the Śaivasiddhānta, but a few early Saiddhāntika works (the *Niśvāsa*, pp. 33–6, and the *Kālottara* and *Sarvajñānottara*, pp. 38–9) have been treated in the former, thus illustrating how difficult it is, as we have remarked above, to separate cleanly the Śaivasiddhānta from other early Śaiva Tantric traditions. More up-to-date, but again confined to Śaivism, and focused on a particular tradition, is *The Canon of the Śaivāgama and the Kubjikā Tantras of the Western Kaula Tradition* (Dyczkowski,

1988). For those who read Hindi, the annotated list of text-names prepared by Gopinātha Kaviraja (1972) is dated, but still useful, and there is the recent survey of Vrajavallabha Dvivedi (2001). A very substantial article by Sanderson covers 'The Śaiva Exegesis of Kashmir' (2007a); an even longer and more recent one, 'The Śaiva Age: The Rise and Dominance of Śaivism During the Early Medieval Period' (2009) is far wider in scope yet (more so than the title might at first suggest) and can be recommended as perhaps the best single starting place for a student wishing to familiarize himself with the Tantric traditions. Geoffrey Samuel's *The Origins of Yoga and Tantra: Indic Religions to the Thirteenth Century* (2008) promises a broad overview, but it is one which is unfortunately based on secondary rather than primary sources, and suffers in consequence. The reader *Tantra in Practice* (ed. White, 2000) offers gobbets in translation from a really vast range of literature that extends well beyond the limits that we have defined in this article. The very latest book-length survey of Tantric Hinduism that of André Padoux (2010), benefits from drawing on that scholar's long and deep experience in the study of, especially, Śaivism. A detailed bibliographical survey of recent research on Śaivism, referring to much more secondary literature than we are able to here, has very recently been given by Shaman Hatley (2010).

The maturity of a field of research may often be judged by the reference works that it has produced. Until the end of the twentieth century, a really helpful dictionary of Tantric Hinduism could not be found (despite the existence of numerous misleadingly titled works such as the *Āgama Kośa*, a semi-organized miscellany of gobbets in 12 volumes recently revised and republished under the title *The Āgama Encyclopaedia*, ed. Ramachandra Rao, 2005). In 2000 the first volume of the Tāntrikābhidhānakośa was published, followed in 2004 by the second; a third may be expected to appear in 2011, with two more volumes to follow. This tool has been increasing in richness from volume to volume, and now goes far beyond what might be expected of a dictionary, with articles which provide references to unpublished as well as published primary sources, and in many cases advance our knowledge of a topic considerably by discussions of diachronic development.

Though the individual traditions of Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava and Buddhist Tantra have each received by now some attention from scholars, they are usually studied in what Strickmann (1996, p. 24) called 'isolement hermétique'. Strickmann called for specialists in Buddhism to make use in their studies of the body of Śaiva Tantric literature available in Sanskrit,[112] but his prediction that those specialists would resist doing so, preferring to remain within the confines of what they defined as Buddhist, has by and large proved correct. The value of a broad approach, studying Tantric Śaivism, Vaiṣṇavism and Buddhism together, has been shown in exemplary fashion in three trail-blazing articles of Sanderson's (1994, 2001 and 2009). The first demonstrates certain relationships between parts of the Śaiva and Buddhist Tantric canons, and the second shows an even wider

range of interrelationships, as its self-explanatory title declares: 'History through Textual Criticism in the Study of Śaivism, the Pañcarātra and the Buddhist Yoginītantras'. In the third, the book-length 'The Śaiva Age', Sanderson examines the factors that led to the rise of Śaiva tantrism, and shows in much greater detail than in his earlier papers, drawing on a very wide range of sources and materials, not only textual, how other religious traditions reacted to this rise, often by adoption and development. A small, but growing, number of other scholars have also demonstrated that this strategy of studying the Tantric traditions together is a fruitful one (see for example Tomabechi, 2007). Inspired by, in particular, a remark in Sanderson 2001,[113] the authors of this article have launched a Franco-German project entitled 'Early Tantra: Discovering the Interrelationships and common Ritual Syntax of the Śaiva, Buddhist, Vaiṣṇava and Saura Traditions', and expect to present the first results of this collaboration between an international group of specialists in various areas of tantrism soon.[114]

Sanderson demonstrates by example that all evidence from the various Tantric traditions should ideally be taken into consideration. For the period to which we restrict ourselves in this survey, the material is predominantly textual (most of it being in Sanskrit). Many of the relevant texts, moreover, are either unpublished or printed with corruptions that make them very difficult indeed to interpret without adducing further manuscript evidence.[115] One of the most urgent research tasks, therefore, is to edit more Tantric literature from manuscripts. This is not merely a labour of mechanical, philological drudgery. Students of Tantric Hinduism must indeed, we aver, be philologists, that is to say, careful and critical readers, sensitive to language, capable of reading manuscript sources accurately and above all equipped with sound judgement; but they must also be able to use other sorts of primary sources (sculptures and inscriptions, for instance) and have an understanding of religious and cultural history and the problems and methods of their study. For it is not possible to edit a Tantric work without an understanding of the context in which it was produced and sensitivity to historical developments. The huge philological undertaking of editing (and translating and annotating) Tantric literature is therefore not merely subservient to the 'higher' task of charting the history of Tantrism.[116] The two endeavours are simply inseparable.

Hindu Philosophical Traditions[117]

David Peter Lawrence

To first skirt around some historical and political controversies: in what follows, the terms 'Hindu' and 'Hinduism' will be used to refer to the broad stream of

religious and philosophical cultures that developed primarily in South Asia, but have spread throughout the world, and which may be distinguished from such other cultures as Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism (see Flood, 1996, pp. 5–22; Lipner, 1998, pp. 1–21). Hindu philosophy will sometimes be designated with the more extensive term, 'Indian philosophy'; that is for the sake of convenience, and is not intended to lessen the importance of the other philosophical traditions that developed in the subcontinent. In such cases, 'India' and 'Indian' refer to the geographical and cultural region and not only the contemporary Republic of India.

What are philosophy and Hindu philosophy? While some scholars of non-Western cultures define philosophy broadly as any worldview or set of beliefs, such definitions fail to recognize the distinctiveness of particular kinds of intellectual discipline that have developed throughout the world. The following discussion will be concerned with philosophy defined more restrictively, as rational inquiry and argumentation about the significance and justifiability of ideas, experiences, values and practices – in which all reasons adduced are in principle open to further questioning and dispute.[118] Many philosophers, of various cultures, advocate specific epistemic or axiological authorities as foundations for their claims, be they revealed texts, sense data, logical implications or intuitions. However, others inevitably question or repudiate such authorities in an open-ended dialogical process. Some philosophers dispute even the possibility of any such authorities.[119] Philosophical inquiry best flourishes in contexts of 'cosmopolitanism', typified by a heightened experience and acceptance of cultural diversity, and of intellectuals being more inclined to approach dialogically the challenges posed by alternative beliefs, experiences and practices.[120] Jean-Pierre Vernant has thus shown how the development of a sphere of public democratic debate in ancient Greece was precursory to the origination of pre-Socratic philosophical speculations (Vernant, 1982). Western philosophy throughout its history has been stimulated by intellectual confrontations between traditions as well as between antecedent and subsequent sides of cultural change.

Sheldon Pollock has delineated a somewhat analogous 'cosmopolitanism' in Sanskrit intellectual culture (Pollock, 2006), and other cosmopolitanisms have developed in other South Asian languages, including English. Hindu philosophy in the Sanskrit cosmopolis was stimulated by thousands of years of encounters between diverse Hindu traditions, and between those and the various schools of Buddhism, Jainism, materialism, and so on. New expressions of Hindu philosophy in other languages are now responding to the challenges of contemporary issues and ideas.

Since 300–400 BCE most formal Hindu philosophy has been propounded in a subclass of Sanskrit academic works called Śāstras. Systems propounded in philosophical Śāstra*s* include the so-called six classic schools with their subdivisions – Pūrva Mīmāṃsā, Uttara Mīmāṃsā/Vedānta, Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika,

Sāṃkhya and Yoga – as well as a number of other equally important traditions, such as Vyakarana , poetic theory, Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, Śaiva Siddhānta, monistic Kashmiri Śaiva Pratyabhijñā and a number of other devotional and Tantric schools.[121] Non-philosophical Sanskrit academic writings, on diverse subjects from medicine to governance, likewise sometimes enter into philosophical discussions. Hindu philosophical reflection is also found in non-academic religious and literary texts, in Sanskrit and many other languages. For the sake of manageability, this essay will focus mainly on approaches to Hindu Śāstraic philosophies, though it will briefly address the study of other expressions.

Post-Enlightenment and Postcolonial Dilemmas

Two deeply intertwined historical problematics strongly affect contemporary academic approaches to Hindu philosophy. In addressing these problematics, scholars must exercise the utmost vigilance to separate unfounded biases from legitimate intellectual considerations.

The first problematic comprises the transformations and conflicts between 'pre-modern', 'modern' and 'post-modern' forms of intellectual culture arising from the Enlightenment. It should not be necessary to mention the challenges that the various expressions of modern science and technology, politics, economics and social values have brought to traditional modes of knowledge and action. The enduring conflicts between modern scientific and premodern religious views of the world are particularly relevant to our subject. While some Western philosophers have endeavoured to mediate these conflicts, the mainstream has shifted allegiance from religion to science. Thus a strong bias against religious beliefs and practices is deeply ingrained in most of contemporary Western philosophy (see Garfield in Malpas et al., 2002, pp. 97–110).

Furthermore, the disciplines of the humanities and social sciences that have developed since the Enlightenment have, implicitly if not explicitly, tended to imitate the physical sciences in interpreting cultures in terms of their presumably empirical expressions and the presumably empirical factors causing them.[122] The present discussion will not address the consequences this reductionistic mode of explanation has had for the interpretation of human agency, but rather its epistemological implications.[123]

Scholarship following such an approach has a strong tendency to treat as irrelevant the ostensible referentiality or epistemic grounds of cultural expressions; it rather explains these expressions as generated by one or another set of non-epistemic factors – textual contents; linguistic or semiotic rules or structures; exemplary metaphors, narratives or paradigms; social, political and economic structures and processes, and so on. The contemporary humanities and social sciences inevitably tend towards 'constructionism' or 'relativism',

which range from 'soft' to 'hard' according to the degree to which they reduce culture to non-epistemic factors.

Scholars are led into postmodern dilemmas as they apply this mode of analysis reflexively to their own views. The epistemic and axiological foundations of modernity are thus explained to be constructions, that is, they are deconstructed.[124] Specialist philosophers, along with the theorists and methodologists in other disciplines, continue to debate whether there are *any* unconstructed grounds of beliefs and practices. Certainly constructionist scholarship has had explanatory successes. Indeed, that is the premise of the present analysis of the factors affecting contemporary studies of Hindu philosophy. This analysis confronts us with the question of whether we can overcome the non-epistemic influences of those factors in order to distinguish more-from-less illuminating approaches to our subject of study.[125]

The second problematic affecting the contemporary study of Hindu philosophy is Western colonialism and neocolonialism, articulated in the academy as Orientalism in the sense defined by Edward Said: the Western domination of the production of knowledge in order to support Western interests (see Said, 1994; Inden, 1990; Chakrabarty, 2000). Orientalism utilizes the modern ideology of the progress of rationality to dichotomize the modern West from the non-West, conceived as backwards in science, technology, politics, economics and social ethics. It has proven very difficult for scholars of non-Western societies to overcome this manner of thinking.

Post-Enlightenment prejudices against tradition and Orientalist prejudices against the non-West are mutually supportive. On the basis of both these sets of prejudices, a majority of Western philosophers, from Hegel through Anthony Flew, have ignored if not flatly denied the existence of philosophical inquiry in India and other Asian civilizations. Wilhelm Halbfass has thus observed that Indian philosophy has been excluded from most Western histories of philosophy both because it developed outside the West, and because of its associations with religion. The latter associations have been viewed as contradicting a 'twofold concept of freedom' requisite for philosophy:

1. a freedom from practical interests – from soteriological motives and from ordinary utilitarian interests i.e. a 'purely theoretical' attitude in which knowledge is sought for its own sake.
2. a freedom from the grip of dogma, myth, and religious and other traditions i.e. the freedom to criticize, to think rationally, and to think for oneself.[126]

In Western universities, the great majority of faculty positions for scholars of Indian philosophy, as well as programmes for the study of the subject, are not

in departments of philosophy, but rather departments of religious studies or areas studies.

Non-Philosophical Studies of Hindu Philosophies

As philosophers in Western-dominated academia have largely ignored Hindu and other non-Western philosophies, the study of them has fallen primarily within the domain of non-philosophical humanistic and social scientific research, which follows the agenda described above, of examining cultural phenomena entirely in terms of their empirical expressions and ostensibly empirical, non-epistemic factors.

The least reductionistic of such approaches, and of incontrovertible value, are philology and descriptive history as are comprised in the field of Indology. It seems undeniable that an understanding of the empirical contents of texts, the immediate circumstances of their production and the relationships between them, is essential to any more theoretical – philosophical or non-philosophical – interpretation of them. Under the British rule, a number of Indological institutes were created in India, and many Indian scholars have integrated Indological approaches with their traditional critical methods for textual scholarship. Indological scholars in India, Europe, Japan and the Americas have published a number of excellent editions, translations, expositions and histories of Indian philosophy. John Nemec has observed that many early Orientalist translations of Sanskrit texts retain their value, even though the scholars who produced them had pejorative views of Indian culture. Nevertheless, Nemec explains, a great deal more translation work is needed to help emancipate scholarship from those scholars' narrow understanding of the South Asian canons (Nemec, 2009, pp. 757–80).

While philology and descriptive history are invaluable, they should not be viewed as the final goal of scholarship on Hindu philosophies. Of course, it is legitimate that scholars have their own individual interests and priorities, and it is admirable that anyone devotes himself or herself to serious philological work. Nonetheless, it would be highly prejudicial to conceive Indian philosophy reductionistically as nothing but the empirical stuff that comprises texts, their contexts and relationships. In this kind of research, as with more ambitiously reductionistic studies, there is no consideration of the truth claims of Indian intellectual traditions and the challenges they pose to the scholars' own beliefs and values.[127]

Moving beyond Indology, it is impossible here to survey the great variety of more reductionistic and constructionist interpretations that scholars have applied to Hindu philosophy and other aspects of Hindu culture – structuralism, semiotics, ethno-sociology, and so on. We may consider the most common

of such approaches as an illustrative example. In accordance with the broader trends of the contemporary humanities and social sciences, currently the most favoured or, should we say, dominant methodologies follow such thinkers as Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, Michel Foucault and Edward Said in explaining philosophy and other aspects of culture as expressions of social, economic and political *power.* Again, the present discussion is itself employing such an analysis to describe how Western power affects contemporary scholarship on Hindu philosophy.

Besides the critique of Orientalism, contemporary South Asian studies have applied the analysis of power to issues in the subcontinent such as ethnicity, caste, gender, kings and their empires and nationalism; Sanskrit has mainly been linked to the prestige of the Brahman castes and pan-Indian culture.

One of the most influential scholars applying this approach to the interpretation of Sanskrit literature is Sheldon Pollock. In his studies of Sanskrit cosmopolitanism, Pollock characterizes academic texts (*śāstras*), including philosophical works, as efforts to define eternal models of knowledge with prescriptive force for all cultural practices, through which the 'sectional interests of pre-modern India are universalized and valorized'.[128] A leading Tantra scholar, David Gordon White likewise utilizes power analysis in describing the philosophical hermeneutics of Tantric traditions created by tenth- and eleventh-century monistic Śaiva writers as a *distortion,* which was 'generated . . . in an effort to win a certain support base of high-caste householders in Kashmir and, later, in Tamil Nadu' (White, 2003, pp. 14; also see p.16). He further contends that Abhinavagupta's philosophical and soteriological interpretation of Tantric sex 'was pitched at a leisured Kashmiri populace whose "bobo" [bourgeois bohemian] profile was arguably homologous to the demographics of the twentieth- and twenty-first-century New Age seekers who treat "Tantric sex" as a consumer product'.[129]

The analysis of the cultural expressions of power has had valuable ethical consequences in struggles against oppression, and it can help to overcome systematic distortions, as in the expressions of political and scholarly neocolonialism. However, an unmoderated reductionism to power may itself become, ironically, a hegemonic expression of a globalized cultural system obsessed with profit, political world order, marketing and media spin.

The German philosopher Karl Otto Apel has characterized various deconstructive theories of culture, including Foucauldian reductions of truth to power, as 'the challenge of a totalizing critique of reason' (Apel, 1996, pp. 250–74). In response, he has endeavoured to reformulate Kant's categorical imperative in terms of *transcendental pragmatic norms of discourse ethics,* the denials of which lead to performative self-contradiction. This ethics comprises non-hegemonic, egalitarian dialogue, following basic principles of logic, directed towards gaining knowledge of the truth about reality.[130]

While aspects of Apel's theory are debatable,[131] he may help us to discern the relevance of analogous moments of 'Sanskritic discursive ethics'. The most influential guidelines for discursive ethics in Sanskritic philosophy were summarized by Gautama in the *Nyāya Sūtra* and elaborated much further in the commentaries. Various other philosophical traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism further modified and built upon the Naiyāyika scheme in their own ways. Though not thematizing power in the same way as contemporary cultural theorists, Sanskritic philosophers have endeavoured in their own ways to minimize its distorting influence by eschewing sophistry for the sake of mere victory (*jalpa,* in the Nyāya terminology), in favour of argumentation for the establishment of truth (*vāda*), or, for the sceptics, at least the cogent critique of the faults of other positions (*vitaṇḍā*).[132]

It could be said, *pace* Foucault, that Sanskritic philosophers have recognized that coherent discourse cannot avoid 'ideology critique' in the sense of separating truth from rhetorical fabrications based on power (see Foucault, 1980). We should thus recognize Sanskrit philosophers' own efforts to propound their arguments according to necessary standards of rational discourse – rather than dismiss those arguments at the outset as a failure to accomplish anything other than Brahmanic ideology.

The problem encountered in the reductionistic application of power theory illustrates more broadly the danger in assuming from the outset that someone else's views are entirely generated by one's disciplinary set of non-epistemic factors. A serious dialogical engagement with the challenge of Hindu philosophies, in which one considers their possible cogency, would seem to be a requisite for any demonstration that they are, despite their prima facie claims, actually something else. Even if scholars do not wish to be philosophers, a greater appreciation of the potentially *unconstructed* truths in others' views might lead them to greater modesty about the scope of their own.

Romantic Idealizations and Morphological Studies

The reverse side to the Western denigration of non-Western cultures has been the romantic idealization of them as superior in their very otherness. On the basis of such idealizations, one might attribute truth to the views of the other. However, one's strong preconceptions might prevent one from adequately understanding those views, and one's preconceptions might still include some unacknowledged derogatory assumptions about the other. Western idealizations of Hinduism have roots in the Hellenistic imagination about India as a land of magic, mystery and secret wisdom.[133] Other important roots are the patristic theology of the *logos spermatikos,* the 'seed word', by which 'pagans' without the Judeo-Christian revelation have innate though partial access to

Jesus as the Logos; and the Hellenistic myth of the *prisci theologi,* 'ancient theologians', predating the classic Greek philosophers, and including the sages of India and Egypt.

Renaissance Neoplatonists and Hermeticists revived conceptions of a primordial wisdom or *philosophia perennis* common to the religious and philosophical traditions of India and other foreign cultures as well as their own traditions of esoteric Christian mysticism (Walker, 1972). Early modern Romanticism often synthesized these perennialist and occultist ideas with conceptions of Hinduism as the 'exotic other' of the dominant modern Western ideology of rationality.[134] The constellation of these various themes about India extends from Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis, through Paul Brunton, Aldous Huxley, Ram Dass and the recent New Age movement.

Categories of hegemonic powers inevitably influence the dominated as well,[135] and thus a number of Hindu revivalist thinkers such as Dayananda Saraswati, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan embraced the same romanticist dichotomy of the spiritual, mystical and otherworldly East versus the scientific and materialistic West (for e.g., see Radhakrishnan, 1974). Such thinkers synthesized the Western *philosophia perennis* with the Hindu *sanātana dharma.*

Academic studies have implemented romantic pursuits of the idealized wisdom of Hindu and other non-Western cultures by searching for patterns of *similarities* between them and Western spiritual traditions. The quest for the universal essence or essences beneath what Rudolf Otto called the 'rational schematizations' of the holy/numen (Otto, 1977) typifies the morphological approach of Religionswissenschaft or comparative religion from the nineteenth century through the first eight decades of the twentieth century. Following principles such as what Mircea Eliade encapsulated as a 'logic of symbols', scholars ranked analogous expressions hierarchically according to how closely they approximated their chosen exemplars (see Eliade, 1959, pp. 86–107; 1974). For Eliade, Hinduism is a prime resource for identifying the archetypal patterns in the religious realizations of 'archaic man'.

The same search for patterns of common truth typifies many comparative studies of Hindu philosophy. Often the ostensibly universal truths are conceived as primarily non-rational or mystical, as evinced in Rudolf Otto's *Mysticism East and West* and Aldous Huxley's popular *Perennial Philosophy* (Otto, 1932; Huxley, 2004). Sometimes, however, comparative philosophical studies, such as the numerous past and present engagements of Western Neoplatonism and absolute idealism with Hindu thought, have included strategies of rational argument among the universal truths (Deussen, 1966; Staal, 1961; Harris, 1981; Gregorios, 2001).

With regard to romantic idealizations, one would not want to deny that there is unique and enduring wisdom in Hindu traditions, however that may

be defined.[136] Without diminishing the greatness of Hindu culture, however, it would be incredible if wisdom and ignorance, rationality and irrationality, were not found in every society. We must progress beyond essentialist and dichotomizing representations of both Western and non-Western cultures. Whether our approach is philosophical or non-philosophical, we need to approach all cultures, including their various philosophical traditions in a nuanced manner, aiming to gain a better appreciation of their various aspects.

In comparative religions, grand morphological agendas have largely been superseded as most scholars have realized that transhistorical metaphysical truths cannot be proven on the basis of historical methods. Comparative research has instead aligned itself with other humanistic and social scientific disciplines in endeavouring to identify patterns determined by common or analogous empirical, historical factors (see Reynolds, 1981, pp. 26–31). Early in the twentieth century, Paul Masson-Oursel already advocated a similar methodology for comparative philosophy (Masson-Oursel, 1926). Following the arguments made in the previous section, however, it would be prejudicial to assume that empirical, historical facts are the only ones to be discovered.

From a philosophical perspective, claims for truths based on similarities between philosophies, insofar as they present genuine agreements rather than accidental likenesses, have the force of a *consensus gentium,* 'common consent', argument. A basic problem with notions of, truth as consent, is that they do not account for the original epistemic determinations of the agreeing views. At the most, genuine agreements between the views of different thinkers might indicate a greater probability for their truth, but that is far from conclusive. There will inevitably be many others who disagree, and many factors other than truth could underlie the agreement. Therefore, a scholar should at the most observe similarities in order to support his or her own philosophical reasoning. The comparativist should make her or his own case for what is true, and further explain whether and how it might be articulated in various philosophical traditions.[137] One might also wish to identify recurrent errors.

Contemporary Sanskritic and Intercultural Philosophical Studies

J. N. Mohanty's observation regarding the study of Indian philosophy in India applies to the overall situation worldwide:

> In India today there is the absurd situation that there are two classes of scholars in Indian philosophy: those who read, think and write in English and the pandits who read and think in Sanskrit. It is the latter group who have preserved scholarship through the centuries, but are second-class

> citizens of the academy; it is the former, who know little but dominate academic life, i.e., have political power in the academic world.[138]

Though this is unfortunately the case, it must be acknowledged that some contemporary scholars writing in Sanskrit have made significant contributions to Hindu philosophy, such as Shankara Chaitanya Bharati on Advaita Vedānta and doxography, Dharmadatta Jha on Nyāya, Raghunatha Sharma on Vyākarana and Ramavatar Sharma, on his own system of Paramārthadarśana. There have also been some efforts to respond to the challenges of Western thought in Sanskrit, such as a dialogue between representatives of Western philosophy and pandits over Western understandings of propositions, arranged by Daya Krishna; and an exposition of Western epistemology by Arindam Chakrabarti.[139]

Nevertheless, most new constructive scholarship on Hindu philosophy is published in Hindi, English and various other contemporary Indian and non-Indian languages. This author certainly hopes that there will be a revival of Sanskrit learning and the publication of an increasing number of new Sanskrit works. It seems probable that at least some Sanskrit learning will survive into the foreseeable future. However, it also seems likely that most new works of Hindu philosophy, even those grounded in the reading of the Sanskrit traditions, will be composed in languages other than Sanskrit. The Indian Sanskrit scholars with whom the author has spoken about this issue share that view.

The discussion above treated the problems in works of comparative philosophy that endeavour to demonstrate universal truths merely on the basis of common patterns of belief. More critical scholarship has come to view comparison as something done neither for its own sake nor for the straightforward demonstration of truths. Such scholarship rather views comparison as a tool for analogically translating ideas into new contexts, and as a stimulus for reflection on alternative ways of conceiving and attempting to solve philosophical problems.[140] In this regard, it is submitted that philosophy has always included a comparative dimension insofar as it involves reflection on the merits of intellectual alternatives.[141] That is why philosophy has best flourished in the context of cosmopolitanism and dialogue. Another, perhaps more appropriate, term that has been used for philosophy as practiced in the globalizing academy, is *intercultural philosophy.*[142]

Over the course of the twentieth century, a variety of scholars, such as Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Krishna Chandra Bhattacharya, N. V. Banerjee, Charles A. Moore, Karl H. Potter, Eliot Deutsch and J. N. Mohanty, pioneered more sophisticated engagements between Hindu and Western philosophy. Scholars who have had extensive training in the philosophies of both civilizations have published the works of the most enduring value. Mohanty, who is still active in the international philosophical scene, is as renowned for his learning in Western phenomenology as in Indian thought.

Probably the most important pioneer in advancing the study of Indian philosophy in the twentieth century was the late Bimal Krishna Matilal, the third Spalding Professor of Eastern Religions and Ethics at Oxford, author of numerous books and articles and founding editor of the leading *Journal of Indian Philosophy.* Matilal was sensitive to historicity and nuances as well as to the exigencies of global dialogue, and he greatly influenced later intercultural philosophical studies of Hindu, Buddhist and other non-Western philosophies.

Matilal's research and that of many others inspired by him follow certain characteristic agendas. These have proven fruitful, but are nevertheless also open to some challenges. One of the chief goals of Matilal and his successors is just to demonstrate the sophistication of Indian philosophies and their relevance to contemporary Western-dominated philosophical inquiry. In his inaugural address on assuming the Spalding Chair, 'The Logical Illumination of Indian Mysticism', Matilal thus endeavoured to refute characterizations of Indian thought as irrational. He demonstrated that even philosophies such as Śrīharṣa's Advaita Vedānta and Mādhyamika Buddhism, which were 'mystical' in the sense of advocating a realization transcending logical discourse, used rigorously rationalistic arguments to lead students towards that realization (Matilal, 1977).

Matilal's style of comparative philosophy typically organizes its presentation of Sanskritic thought around topics of current interest in Western philosophy, especially in Anglo-American treatments of logic, language, epistemology and ontology. Most of his books, as well as many though not all subsequent works in the genre, survey a variety of Hindu, Buddhist and Jain works to demonstrate the insights they can bring to the Western discussions (see Matilal, 1971, 1985, 1990). Although the topics and claims made vary, these studies, in line with the originary interests of analytic philosophy, also usually give some deference to secular, scientific knowledge and mathematical rationality.[143] Matilal's special interest was to demonstrate the value of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika tradition for defending 'direct' or 'naive' realism in the face of contemporary conundrums about scepticism versus realism.[144]

Reflecting the broader historical problematics, Matilal likewise often abstracts Sanskrit philosophical theories away from their associations with religious and practical matters.[145] However, in some writings he does begin to address such issues, as will be further discussed below. It is also notable that, in intercultural philosophical studies after Matilal, the old concern persists about whether Indian philosophy is more practical or theoretical in orientation. However, there is no uniform position among scholars about whether practicality would be a problem or a virtue, perhaps because philosophical pragmatism has become more generally respectable as an option.[146] It is interesting that debates about theory versus action are also common in research on Chinese philosophy.[147]

A criticism that might be raised against Matilal and others working along similar lines is that they perpetuate a hegemonic, colonial mentality in treating modern Western philosophy as the standard by which Indian philosophy should be evaluated.[148] This author does not believe that is the case, even though such scholarship, inevitably, has limitations. In support of Matilal's project, it may be observed that one must address prejudices in order to overcome them. Furthermore, it would be no more reasonable to dismiss the concerns and methods of any Western philosophy because it is Western, than those of any non-Western philosophy because it is non-Western. Beyond the systematic distortions derived from power, Western modes of thought certainly do present legitimate intellectual challenges to Hindu ones, just as the opposite is certainly the case. Most importantly, Matilal was, by most accounts, highly successful in initiating a substantive and nuanced engagement between Indian and Western thought. As the philosophical academy becomes more equitable and open-minded about intellectual options, scholars of non-Western philosophies may be expected increasingly to engage in dialogue with each other, and not only with those in the West.[149]

Further Developments

In his Oxford inaugural address and occasionally in other works Matilal did begin to treat issues of Hindu philosophy of religion and ethics. In the philosophy of religion, besides the logical study of mysticism, he also briefly addressed topics such as the existence of God, ineffability and theodicy (see Matilal, 1982). He also became particularly interested in ethical philosophy as articulated in classic Sanskrit narratives and treatises on *dharma,* and was reportedly planning a book with Gayatri Spivak entitled *Ethics and Epics.*[150]

Comparative philosophers and theologians are continuing to advance both these areas of inquiry. In the philosophy of religion, new works are being published on topics such as philosophical discourse as a means of interreligious understanding, Hindu-Buddhist arguments for and against the existence of God or a Self, and the epistemology of revelation (see Arnold, 2005; Clooney, 2001; Lawrence, 1999; Patil, 2009; Rambachan, 2006; Ram-Prasad, 2007; Sharma, 1995). There is also increasing interest in Hindu philosophical reflections on ethics in various academic as well as narrative genres. Some scholars are also working on Hindu approaches to the pressing subject of environmental ethics.[151]

Another subject that is becoming increasingly important in intercultural approaches to Hindu philosophies is consciousness studies. This field builds upon earlier philosophy of mind and integrates discussions in biology, evolutionary psychology, evolutionary linguistics and cognitive science. It addresses basic issues that are relevant to many premodern philosophies and religions,

such as self and embodiment. While, contrary to some stereotypes, Sanskritic philosophy is not all about consciousness, it certainly does comprehend thousands of years of sophisticated theorization on this subject. In research so far, the most attention has been directed to Hindu and Buddhist debates about whether introspection is integral to consciousness, or a kind of higher order awareness; and about the relations of consciousness to the mind and the body (see MacKenzie, 2007, pp. 40–62; Chakrabarti, 1999; Gupta, 2003; Mohanty, *Reason and Tradition in Indian Thought,* 1992 pp. 26–53; Ram-Prasad, 2007, pp. 51–99; Timalsina, 2009; T. S. Rukmani in Jacobsen, forthcoming). There is a great deal more to explore, including Hindu theorization on the relation of language to consciousness.

Picking up on arguments made earlier in this essay, it would be highly salutary to advance dialogues between Hindu philosophical traditions and the Western-dominated humanistic and social scientific theories that have been applied to Hindu philosophy along with other aspects of Hindu culture. Some scholars in disciplines such as anthropology and psychology have already endeavoured to problematize their approaches by considering the challenge of indigenous self-understandings. These are important steps towards getting beyond the treatment of such self-understandings as nothing more than 'informant accounts' or 'primary texts'.[152]

Nevertheless, a great deal more must be done to overcome a tendency for such dialogical efforts to become representations of other cultures merely as alternative ways of trafficking with realia to which scholars' own disciplines have privileged access. By the principle of the hermeneutic circle, however much we learn, we always begin and end with our own positions, and it is unreasonable to expect scholars entirely to surrender their disciplinary purchase on reality. Still, scholars need to learn much more about, and take more seriously the academic viability of South Asia's thousands of years of intellectual traditions in diverse areas such as political and social theory, psychology, linguistics and semiotics, aesthetics, medicine and so on.[153]

Some promising philosophical rubrics for these dialogues may be developed in an engagement more specifically between Western and Hindu *hermeneutics,* understood as self-reflexive theories and correlated practices of interpretation. Like other literate traditions, and probably more than most, Hindu Sanskritic culture may be characterized by a proliferation of hermeneutics. Hindu hermeneutics include intra- and inter-scriptural reformulations since the Veda; post-scriptural exegetics, text-with-commentary protocols of academic discourse (*śāstra*); academic modes dialogue and debate; and poetics. Hindu and other South Asian philosophies likewise engaged over centuries in abstract inquiries into the formative, epistemic and non-epistemic roles of conceptualization (*vikalpa*) and language (*śabdana*) in experience. A number of scholars have begun to examine these diverse areas of Hindu hermeneutics, and to consider what they might mean for contemporary efforts to understand Hinduism.[154]

It has already been mentioned, and it should be obvious, that not all philosophical thought is comprised within the discourses of academic philosophers. Mention has also been made of new philosophical studies of the ethics articulated in Hindu narrative texts. There is a great need for many more such efforts – to exposit and interpret the philosophical reflections, on more topics, in a still wider range of Hindu religious and literary expressions, oral and written, in Sanskrit as well as other languages.[155] Mohanty has rightly observed that much of the most important Hindu philosophical thought in recent history has been the work of religious, literary and political leaders such as Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo and Mohandas Gandhi (Mohanty, *Explorations in Philosophy,* 2001, pp. 56–74). Numerous, more recent names could be mentioned. Ongoing academic studies of Hindu philosophy also need to engage the thought of such public intellectuals.

Conclusion

As this discussion of the study of Hindu philosophy has been largely programmatic in nature, the author has endeavoured to minimize his advocacy for particular philosophical theses, and rather to indicate what seem to be some of the most important obstacles to avoid and worthwhile areas to explore. Most urgently, it is hoped that the factors leading to the deterioration of traditional Hindu philosophical learning can be overcome, and that such learning can be revived among enlarged groups of people in South Asia and elsewhere. At the same time, it has been suggested that the study of Hindu philosophy should be integrated into the development of a much broader cosmopolis for academic philosophical inquiry than has hitherto existed, one in which a great range of viewpoints can be articulated and debated – whether they are old or new, religious or non-religious, from this group or that.

It might be argued that the pursuit of such a cosmopolis is itself an imposition onto the world of the values of Western democracies or perhaps even the norms of the globalizing capitalist marketplace. All claims are situated, and the present discussion is certainly influenced by developments of our time, regardless of the author's own critical positions on neocolonialism and negative aspects of economic globalization. However, the cosmopolitanism being advocated is not a situation in which cultures are homogenized and commodified, but rather one in which differences are respected and treated as a basis for mutual enlightenment and eclification. Furthermore, the pursuit of this academic cosmopolitanism cannot be reduced to historical circumstances, but has philosophical probity.

Amidst all their disagreements, and notwithstanding the frequency of dogmatism, intolerance and disingenuousness, there has been much concord among philosophers as well as other academics over the course of world

history, regarding some basic norms for discourse ethics. One cannot maintain intellectual integrity if one repudiates the principle of egalitarian communication, in which arguments are judged on their own merits, rather than on the basis of ideological, religious or ethnic categories, or the power of those who propound them. At least as a counterfactual ideal, all should be able to voice their positions and their reasons for them. Even if one wishes to attempt to refute the views of others who do not accept one's epistemic and axiological authorities, doing that authentically requires that one properly understand those views, and that one respond to them fairly and cogently. If given the opportunity, one's opponent may wish to argue back. As very few issues are clear-cut, many dialogues are likely to be open-ended.

The realization of the enormous diversity of arguable viewpoints, as well as of the ways in which they might be distorted or constructed by historical factors, should instill in us modesty about the certainty of our own viewpoints. From the wisdom that we know much less than we thought we did may arise a sense of wonder, which, according to the oldest Hindu thought as much as to the Hellenistic, may inspire us to learn. Theories such as the Jaina doctrine of the multiplicity of reality (*anekāntavāda*), the monistic Śaiva concept of ignorance as imperfect cognition (*apūrṇa khyāti*), William James's philosophy of a 'pluralistic universe', and Davidson's formulation of the principle of charity further suggest that every viewpoint is in some respects true and rational. Therefore, it is likely that we can actually all learn a lot from each other.[156]

While there might not ever be a convergence towards a single, right way of thinking, we should hope – again as a counterfactual ideal – that there may be 'progress' in the development of an expanded philosophical academy. Progress in creating openness to diverse intellectual possibilities should only facilitate progress with our own efforts to examine critically the issues of our lives that, as Socrates suggests, make those lives worth living. We may thus also concur with Gautama's suggestion in the first verse of the *Nyāya Sūtra* that the knowledge of the requirements of proper philosophical inquiry is the means to the highest felicity (*Niśreyas*) (Gautana et al, p. 28).

Hindu Society in Anthropological Perspective

Marie Lecomte-Tilouine

Setting aside the double complexity of the subject, the two key terms of which are somewhat badly defined, what we might broadly call the anthropology of Hindu society is an area that covers the culture and the social organization of those who define themselves as Hindu. However, as D. Gellner (2001, pp. 4–7)

has pointed out, the precise object of study in anthropology remains rather nebulous, and the discipline is somewhat defined by its methodology: that is, fieldwork. In this respect, the anthropology of Hindu society coincides relatively well with what was known as the sociology of India in the 1960s. Both are supposedly studies of the contemporary world, and sociology at the time privileged long periods of fieldwork in rural India. However, the anthropology of Hindu society was quickly caught in the net of genealogy: on the one hand, that of its own history, as in any disciplinary field, but also, on the other hand, that of the controversial history of its object of study. The indeterminacy of the object of anthropology is thus redoubled in this case by the indeterminacy of the particular area of research which may be called 'Hinduism'. As a matter of fact, the field is currently being informed by several major questions regarding this issue. The first of them is quite simply: what is to be understood as Hinduism? Is it reference to a corpus of texts?[157] To some of the gods mentioned in those texts? To the group of people who supposedly wrote them and hold the function of priest? Or, quite simply, respect for the cow? Is it intrinsically linked to caste? Are the untouchable and impure castes, who are not traditionally allowed to listen to the Holy Scriptures or to employ a Brahmin priest, to be counted among the Hindus? How are we to situate the 'tribal' groups whose social organization and religious practices often do not radically differ from their caste neighbours? All these questions are fundamentally linked to the history of the concept of Hinduism, which was formed not so long ago, and furthermore from a noun originally denoting a broad regional identity, not a religion. They ultimately depend on the answers to the following: when was Hinduism created and who is at the origin of this concept? At what time were castes introduced and are they strictly correlated to religion (and to hierarchy)? The implicit or explicit answers to these questions have largely conditioned anthropological approaches to Hindu society,[158] and account for the debates that animate the field. In these pages, I will first follow the thread of its very history, then discuss the contributions and difficulties introduced by the archaeological and genealogical perspective when applied to the anthropology of Hinduism.

This disciplinary field started developing in the 1950s, from two legacies: colonial ethnography on the one hand, and Indology on the other. It has clearly distanced itself from the practice of cataloguing and classifying cultural facts dear to colonial ethnography (at least on a conceptual level, since the so-called descriptive trend is far from having totally died out; however, it is no longer the object of scientific recognition other than as a necessary preliminary stage in research). By contrast, until today, the field has maintained much more complicated relations with Indology and History. Indeed, it initially emerged through a methodology which combined field observation of contemporary practices and discourses with considerations taken from the content of ancient normative texts, especially as the latter were made available by P. V. Kane's

monumental compendium (1962–1975), widely cited by anthropologists in the 1960s and 1970s.

In seeking broad principles governing the conduct of all Hindus, anthropology has drawn on Indology to find ultimate explanations for observed phenomena. In doing so, the discipline contributed to reifying brahminical views and standards, and established them as universal values prevailing over the entire Hindu society. The latter was therefore built in the same movement as a single, inclusive, social system, from which only renouncers could possibly escape. It was seen as being governed by a unique fundamental principle, that of the opposition of the pure and the impure, which prevailed not only over all individual behaviour but also over the whole social organization at each of its levels. It formed the basis on which its clustered and hierarchical architecture and the complementarity of each caste's role within a global or holistic model were founded. It also implied certain rules that resulted from the first principle, such as the disjunction of status and power (doubled by the prominence of the spiritual over the temporal).

This is, in short, Louis Dumont's modelization of caste society (Dumont, 1966), which is now worthy of being described as 'traumatic', insomuch as the entire discipline has had difficulty recovering from it ever since. A similar approach, but shifting in the opposite direction, was undertaken by one of the most eminent Indologists among the contemporaries of Louis Dumont: Madeleine Biardeau, who, in a book entitled *Hinduism, Anthropology of a Civilization,* explored the brahminical notions of karma, saṃsāra, āśrama (the stages in the Brahmin's life), and of bhakti, and presented them as the ideological foundation of the civilization in question. The extraordinary fecundity resulting from bringing together Indology and Sociology within an intellectual landscape dominated by structuralism was such that the Dumontian approach steadily formed the basis on which other conceptions of the Hindu world developed, either by adding phenomena that would have escaped it, or by taking into account the way those it had modelled had evolved or by refuting its arguments.

The idea of a unique and immutable structure of caste society was confronted with observable diversity and change. In addition to the importance of local and regional particularism – which were addressed but not developed by Dumont through the notion of dominance and the acknowledgement of regional features ('faciès') of the caste system – collective empowerment (Béteille, 1992) and autonomy processes were widely documented. The idea of a global hierarchical order of castes had already been criticized by A. Béteille in 1966 for ignoring the antagonistic aspect of their working rules (Béteille, 1992); this dimension seems to have become more and more central in subsequent decades with the weakening of the services which tied together the different caste groups, leading to their ritual and economic autonomization. This process, referred to as the

'substantialization of caste', accounts for the existence of social change within Hindu society and the weakening of its global hierarchy, but does not help draw a new, general overview of the latter. Instead, it has led to a major, yet unsolved, quandry: are the changes observed in the caste organization likely to lead to a merging of the various castes or to emphasizing their differences?

Another trend, born among historians (Cohn, 1971; Fox, 1971; Dirks, 1986) opposed to the disembodied view of the caste system as a structure detached from any specific territorial base and largely regulated by immemorial brahminical values, is the model of a society revolving around the royal person (or function) within a circumscribed, but not limited, area: the 'little kingdom'. The model reintroduced tribal groups (whose co-existence with a holistic and inclusive system was poorly explained in the Dumontian model other than by an uncompleted process of incorporation) and assigned them a legitimizing role vis-à-vis Hindu kingship. Indeed, the small kingdom's symbolic source of power relied on the adoption of tribal deities or tribal priests at the heart of the political apparatus. This neo-Hocartian approach[159] was developed in the anthropological field from a perspective which proposes a concentric reading of the caste organization, revolving around the source of political power (Quigley, 1993; Raheja, 1988).

From one model to the other, the conception of Hindu society as a hierarchical and linear system, informed from above (occupied by religious and moral values held by the Brahmins), has shifted to become an organization revolving around its political centre, which ensures the redistribution of wealth, and the display and reinforcement of social cohesion during great State rituals. The two models seem to correspond respectively to a brahminical perspective and to a Kṣatriya perspective of the Hindu social world. In both cases, the principles that organize society are formulated on a religious basis, whether brahminical standards defining the pure and the impure or the ritual expression of political power. Economy is also defined in religious terms, through the centrality attributed to the sacred contract between patron and client in the jajmani system in the first case, and through the vast network of royal 'gifts' (or from the dominant caste) in the second. The religious character of social organization into caste is not only expressed in Sanskrit mythological texts which establish and legitimate this ideology, as well as in many collective rituals that set the stage and enact a specific social order, but it was also reflected in the Western conception of Hinduism, understood as a set of inseparable social and religious institutions.[160] In fact, no term corresponds precisely to 'religion' in the languages of the Indian subcontinent, and the latter understanding of Hinduism fits in well with the notion of Hindu *dharma*, which encompasses both the social and the cosmic order. On the other hand, it coincides with it so well that it tends to reproduce the local dominant ideology.

After these two perspectives on the Hindu social organization seen respectively from its two main spheres of power, the spiritual and the temporal, the approach to Hindu society focused (or 'fell back', as it could be said) on the rest of society or on those who were then designated as subaltern. This refocusing was initiated by the Subaltern Studies group,[161] which is mainly a historical and ethno-historical school, but whose influence spread across the whole range of social sciences. Subaltern Studies identified the nineteenth century as the key-period to understanding present-day India and favoured the analysis of the impact of colonialism on Indian society. Within this framework, its anthropological approaches, as undertaken in the years 1960–1970, were criticized for their attention to institutions – among them caste and the very concept of Hinduism – that were a mere colonial invention, and the co-substantiality of the caste organization and of the Hindu religion has been questioned. It is true that the terms 'caste' and 'Hinduism' which designate these recently identified 'colonial inventions', represent the most fundamental concepts of the sociology of India, but are exogenous to any Indian language. The noun 'casta' was first introduced by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century and originally referred to a race, species or specific category of beings. It is thus very close to the term *jāt* or *jāti* used in North Indian languages.[162] Hinduism, on the other hand, only appeared in English (and in other European languages) at the very end of the eighteenth century, under the pen of colonial administrators and foreign missionaries, a few decades earlier than the dates so far advanced of 1829 or 1816.[163] This new-ism certainly contributed to artificially unifying a vast set of variegated practices and conceptions, especially on a conceptual plane, yet the impact of this very notion on practices and local perceptions still needs to be further documented and discussed. In this matter, a political dimension clearly affects research, and as D. N. Lorenzen recalls, a Hindu religious identity had already emerged from contact with the Muslims long before the British colonial period.[164]

Be that as it may, it is misleading to consider the history of religious and social phenomena as the key to their anthropological understanding, since it does not account for the role they play in today's society and it even introduces a form of anachronism – or catachronism – in the field of research. History demystifies the doxa of an epoch (i.e. the taken-for-granted assumptions or orthodoxies), but in doing so, it may reflect another one and transpose it in time. Ironically, leftist historians and social scientists have in fact joined Hindu nationalists and fundamentalists in their reluctance to consider the caste as a Hindu institution and in their rejection of it into the field of alterity.[165] Rather than banishing them, and whatever their origin, it is necessary to examine why these 'inventions' have met with such success in India. It is even more important to understand the role they play in present-day social spheres in India and Nepal, where caste discrimination has been illegal for several decades, and

which are now characterized by heteredoxy and informed by antagonist ideologies, which however, all officially condemn inherited social hierarchy. Thus, it is important to investigate how social actors reconcile their own social practices with their political and humanitarian ideals, to delimit the new arenas of commensality and those that remain restricted, the ongoing variety of expressions of caste markers and sociabilty, and the numerous ways in which caste is made manifest by transcoding[166] it into the register of behaviour, taste, ability or competence or even by a mere 'return of the repressed'. This type of investigation would help to nuance any portrayal of present Hindu society, and to avoid falling into the trap of adopting extreme positions; asserting, at one extreme, the present inexistence of any social hierarchy[167] linked to caste[168] and at the other extreme, denying 'subalterns' any possible form of expression and thus condemning them to be forever represented – and analysed – by their superiors (see Spivak, 1988).

At this point in the discussion, we suggest that 'postcolonial' studies resort to making a comparison with Hindu contexts which did not fall under the yoke of colonialism. This is the case in Nepal, which has never been invaded or colonized, except in the minds of the local tribal groups that make up a third of its population, by Hindus from India. 'Foreign' (i.e. Mughal and British) influence was minimal in Nepal, yet its caste-structured society has not only developed considerably but has also been imposed on the whole tribal population. Taking into account studies on the subject carried out by specialists of India would therefore help to relativize the impact of foreign invasion and colonization. On the other hand, it would stress the role played by the centralization of the State in this process. Indeed, in both cases, a rigidification of the caste system has occurred within this framework, but while it is merged with things colonial in India, strict governmental control over the caste hierarchy and its rules was primarily consecutive to the 'unification' of about fifty independent kingdoms by a Hindu king in Nepal. Such a comparison would also relativize the interpretation of the inventory of castes and tribes made by the colonial census. Whereas in India, it was interpreted as part of the 'divide and rule' politics and abandoned after Independence for fear of maintaining or reinforcing the caste, in Nepal, such types of statistics were first produced in 1991, following the 1990 constitution which introduced multi-partism, and was equated with a democratic process. Indeed, the results revealed the extraordinary over-representation of upper castes[169] in the public administration and political parties, and were then used extensively by 'Indigenous peoples' and low-caste groups to sustain their demands for social justice.

A focus on the subaltern is also noticeable in the recent anthropological approach which concerns more specifically the Hindu religion and has taken the form of studies on 'popular Hinduism' that generally excludes from its field of research, in an implicit but also sometimes an explicit manner, brahminical

values. For some anthroplogists, even the Brahmins themselves, as the 'representatives' of this orthodoxy, should be excluded from their study. According to the authors, 'popular Hinduism' refers to the folklore or the religion of the 'masses' as opposed to the scholarly tradition, the 'little tradition' opposed to the 'great tradition', the religion of lower-status groups as opposed to that of the upper caste, or, the 'living, "practical" religion of ordinary Hindus', a last definition by C. Fuller (1992), which has the advantage of being non-exclusive.

Frequent exclusion of the Brahmins, or the brahminical forms of religion, from anthropological approaches to Hinduism deserves attention. On the one hand, it may be viewed as a legacy of an ancient tradition of mistrust vis-à-vis the Brahmin among Westerners dating from colonial times, which took on a significant dimension to sometimes become a conspiracy theory.[170] The consequences of excluding the elite and its norms seemingly represent an obstacle even to exploring the nature of the resistance and the modalities of autonomy that other parts of the population might oppose. This does not mean that they necessarily have to form the starting point for analysis, except to conduct a study of popular Hinduism among Brahmins (who are far from practising only orthodox forms of rituals), but that they are a reference point vis-à-vis which individuals and groups define themselves or are positioned, and that they introduce tension in the social sphere throughout the Indian subcontinent. On the other hand, their exclusion favours a shifting of perspective which is heuristically constructive, for it allows this field of study to be viewed in a totally new manner. Indeed, low-status groups have long been neglected, and recent contributions have shown that they attach more importance to power than to purity (Herrenschmidt, 1989), and that they have developed rich popular exegesis parallel to the upper caste's textual tradition (Assayag, 1992). By refusing their traditional role in many regions, they introduce innovation. Thus, in South India, migrants from this social origin often undertake to transform their new economic wealth into symbolic capital by sponsoring costly rituals which were once reserved for upper castes, while abandoning any participation in stigmatizing rituals. This falls within Sanskritization, but the study of it, such as undertaken by Filippo and Caroline Osella (2003), not only retraces its conditions of emergence through the various historical changes which make it possible (such as the 1936 Temple Entry legislation and the collapse of the landed elites), but also addresses its perception by the audience that acts as the arbitrator between rival patrons. They conclude: 'Ritual supplies the ever-shifting ground for contestations of control, tournaments of worth and assertions of values, while confronting and attempting to domesticate these social changes'. This remark, however, is certainly not valid in a context such as Nepal, where Hindu rituals do not represent such a major social issue: many are just boycotted by the 'indigenous peoples', while the Dalits 'are seeking political and economic

power rather than the ritual power', as the (Dalit) author B. K. Amar Bahadur (2008, p. 6) observes.

In spite of profound regional differences, it is clearly apparent that all over the Indian subcontinent, the ritual articulation of the caste system is on the wane, with low castes refusing to continue to play a stigmatizing role in public festivals or towards their upper-caste neighbours. This has led to the weakening of the impure ritual services,[171] and the professionalization of the latter.[172] Parallel to this form of secularization of the caste organization, its perpetuation in the political sphere has been observed.[173] Indeed, the bonds linking castes have been maintained in the form of clientelism, which characterized the Indian political sphere in the first decades following Independence. However, in northern India, it left room for the political empowerment of OBC castes after 1990, and their alliance with the SC (Jaffrelot, 2003).

Whether perceived in a hierarchical manner or not, the subcontinent does not cease to display a fascinating expression of positions and identities which emphasize differenciation.[174] Faced with the idea of a strict hegemony of brahminical values that one should get rid of to finally reach a genuine anthropology of Hindu society, its polycentry offers many avenues of research. Nowhere else are manifestations of social or religious identity, or of political affiliation, given expression through the same narrative, as is the case with the Rāmāyaṇa, in which castes, groups and parties identify with a specific character, assign their opponent a role model incarnated by one of them or even reverse their roles (Thapar, 2000). Even strongly anti-Hindu ethnic activists or atheistic Maoist revolutionaries in Nepal find this Hindu religious epic metaphor relevant when expressing their position. This advocates a relational approach to Hindu society and, given its diversity and contextual particularities, for a new collective effort of comparison, similar to the one focusing on villages in the 1950s and 1960s, but this time taking the regional level as a scale of study.

Hindu Iconology and Worship

Kenneth R. Valpey

As grand festivities in honour of Ganeśa conclude, giant images of the 'elephant-headed god' are paraded by huge crowds through Mumbai's streets to the sea, where they are submerged, returning them to the elements from which they were fashioned. Or in Tamil Nadu, centuries-old metal images of various deities are preserved in a government vault, 'protecting' them from thieves while they corrode to ruin (Davis, pp. 256–9). Elsewhere a respected traditional *sthāpati* artist carves a granite image of Lakṣmī, commissioned for a temple in

Kentucky, USA. And in thousands of settlements across India, women present their daily offerings of incense, flowers and vermilion powder to local goddesses in their village shrines, which are perhaps nestled among several *liṅgas* – aniconic representations of god Śiva that the same women are likely then to honour by showering with milk. Or again, a solitary *sādhu* sits cross-legged in his Himalayan cave, meditating for hours at a time before a small unframed glossy print (taken from a calendar printed for an Indian cotton manufacturer), of Pañcamukha Hanumān – the devotee-god associated with Rāma, appearing with five heads. These and countless other types of images and ways of relating to images may all be considered instances and relevant aspects of Hindu iconography and practices of Hindu iconographic production and reception which, together with the wide range of conceptualizations about such images, constitute the iconology that is integral to most if not all forms of Hindu religious life.

In a short overview of Hindu iconology, visual hermeneutics, and worship, as is being attempted here, an underlying question needs to be kept in sight, namely, how the specification 'Hindu' that any image or iconographic characteristic or practice or understanding carries may be appropriately, relevantly or otherwise meaningfully applied, and by and for whom this application is made. At the same time we may agree with Joanne Waghorne on the centrality of divine embodiment in Hinduism, of which iconography is a dominant expression: 'the embodiment of divinity' is 'the central feature of Hinduism *and . . .* a central feature in the study of religion' (Waghorne and Cutler, p. 7).

With both this reservation and affirmation in mind, the attempt here will be to bring into focus important and often contrary features of Hindu iconology and its study. This will entail consideration of 'visual hermeneutics' – the interpretation of images and the typically reverential practices related to seeing (and being seen by) images – which can be seen as an activity that brings interpreters to borderline regions of perception and thought, between reality and imagination, between thought and action, between the sense of unity and the sense of multiplicity or between the mundane and the sacred. The complexities and subtleties of Hindu iconology can be daunting for the newcomer to its study, but for students of Hindu traditions who pay persistent attention to their iconographic dimensions, there is great reward in learning to 'read' in these modes and then to articulate or translate in words (or perhaps in other media) what has been experienced. Here it is hoped that some mapping, calling attention to, regrettably, only a fraction of relevant recent scholarship as well as to potential areas for further study, may facilitate entry into and around this field.

As we are concerned here with images and imagery, a loosely 'semeiotic' organizational principle echoing Charles S. Peirce's threefold scheme of experience of 'firstness, secondness, and thirdness' (more for convenience than with

any intention to engage Hindu iconology with Peircean semeiotic, though this might be an interesting project). Here we will rename Peirce's three categories in terms of types, levels or 'orders' of meaning (following Rappaport, pp. 392–4), calling the three categories 'approaches', namely (1) classification approaches; (2) comparison approaches and (3) ritual approaches. Following overviews of these three broad approaches to Hindu iconology I will offer some brief general remarks and suggest areas for potential research calling for more attention than has been thus far given in this area of study.

Classification Approaches

The notion in South Asia that a divinity has bodily form and specific characteristics is articulated already in the earliest known text, the *Ṛgveda*, and its collection of hymns dedicated to several individual gods functions as an early listing of iconographic variety. This variety seems to be a source of consternation by the time of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (3.9.1), in which Yajñavalkya is persistently questioned about the number of gods until, after initially suggesting that there are 3,306 ('three-hundred and three, and three thousand and three') finally concludes that there is but one god. Whatever was considered the number of gods, multiplicity within a single divine being is mentioned already in the celebrated Puruṣa-sūkta hymn (*Ṛgveda* 90.1-16) in the description of the Puruṣa having 'thousands of heads, eyes, and feet'.

The identification of images, especially as representative of specific deities (i.e. Śiva, Viṣṇu, Sūrya or Śrī), by means of typologies has characterized brahminical writings on iconography and art (*śilpa-śāstra*) since early centuries of the common era. One (relatively late) Sanskrit instructional text for painters, the *Citrasūtra* of the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa*, is a notable example of such codifying effort to secure links between form or features and represented deity (or human being). But like similar texts, the *Citrasūtra* also shows concern with expression of mood or feeling (*rasa*) in painting, such that its apparent preoccupation with classification turns out to be closely linked to the observance of rules associated with ritual dance, which is considered the basis of painting (see for example *Citrasūtra* 42.85, and ch. 43).

Also, codification in such literature is tied with standardization, whereby such apparently prescriptive texts specify precise details of iconometry as well as hand positions (and items held in the hands), proper ornamentation and appropriate facial expression, all specified for particular deities and linked to injunctions for selection of particular deities to be fashioned for worship to fulfil specific aims of deities' sponsors (see Nardi, *passim*).

Other more or less brahminical texts (generally in Sanskrit) – such as Purāṇas associated with traditions of affiliation and Vaikhānasa, Pañcarātra, Śaiva

Āgama or Śakta Tantra texts – are addressed less to image makers than to image worshippers – temple priests or householders – who aim to achieve proximity and relationship to a divinity, with or without specific gains in mind. Here descriptions of a divinity's form are typically set within prescriptions to meditate upon or in some way visualize the form described, as a means of, or an aspect of, invoking the desired deity into one's presence. Classification of sacred images may be, for example, of position (whether the image is lying, sitting, standing or dancing); of physical material (stone, metal, wood, jewels, clay, sand, paint or existing in the mind); of gender (male, female or both combined); of origin (fashioned by a human being, a celestial being or 'self-manifest'); whether iconic or aniconic (an image with 'human' features or a Śiva *liṅga,* or a sacred stone, e.g. Śālagrāma stone); and whether moveable or immoveable.

But in connection with meditational practices, in later bhakti practice prescription may yield to preference: a deity may be said to conform to a devotee's desire to see her or him in a particular form. This 'logic of reciprocation' that characterizes bhakti traditions is, in turn, understood to be based on the deity's inclination to bestow mercy upon his or her devotee.

Not to be ignored in the history of Hindu iconographical classification are the classifications of 'outsiders' to the traditions, such as those of Muslim identity, for whom all Indic anthropomorphic imagery and associated worship practices would have been classified as *shirk*. Similarly, European Christian travellers, colonialists or missionaries perceived strangeness or incomprehensibility, if not monstrosity or the presence of 'devils' in Hindu iconography (Mitter, pp. 9–27).

Contemporary studies of Hindu iconography are myriad, often identifying themselves within the academic discipline of art history. Titles of such works typically indicate classificatory choice, in terms of location in time and space (e.g. R. Rao's *Apsaras in Hoysala Art*); a particular deity (e.g. Śrīvāstava's *Ūma-Maheśvara: An Iconographic Study of the Divine Couple*); a tradition of affiliation (e.g. Welankar's *Vaishnavism: An Iconographic Study*); or gender (e.g. *Devī: Goddesses in Indian Art and Literature*). Much of this literature serves to catalogue particular ranges of the 'iconographic record' of India, and as such tends to be concerned with historical setting, commissioning circumstances, characteristic stylistic features, and the like. There are of course also general works on Hindu iconography, such as Gopinatha Rao's *Elements of Hindu Iconography* or J. N. Banerjea's rather comprehensive *The Development of Hindu Iconography*, the latter providing a useful overview of the subject that is attentive to historical development.

All that has been mentioned thus far with respect to approaching Hindu iconography through classification has been within a fairly narrow perspective that might be characterized as *static* – making an assumption that images are to be viewed as more or less fixed forms positioned in more or less fixed places set

within fixed iconographic relationships to other images and to persons who commission, make, sell, view or worship them. As we move on to the 'comparative approach', we may do well to take note that *fluidity* is an important theme in Indian visual representation generally and in Hindu visual representation in particular, arguably reflective of a dominant Indic philosophical and theological emphasis on worldly temporality, but also of transcendent dynamism. However stationary an image may be, it is its dynamic character – whether shown by its expression or by its multiple arms (it has been suggested that multiple arms on an image show an early form of cinematic movement), or by its location amidst other images, or even by its frequent invisibility behind temple doors during certain rituals performed by priests – that secures their significance or claim to 'presence' in the Hindu religious and cultural landscape. By paying attention to *fluidity,* whether as the transient nature of images fashioned for short-term worship (Waghorne and Cutler, pp. 161–3) or in the shifting situations in which a given image is placed and replaced (Davis, *passim*), or as the portrayal of divine beings on the cinema screen (Dwyer, *passim*), much scholarly work can be done to counterbalance all that is based on a more or less static view of the subject.

Finally, in the matter of categorization, as suggested earlier, one needs to constantly question whether or not the category 'Hindu' is meaningfully and beneficially applied, or whether its use sets an artificial boundary that obscures more than it reveals about a particular image or group of images, or about ways that images are 'read'.

Comparative Approaches

In his recently published study of Hinduism Ariel Glucklich chose the famous and ancient narrative of Viṣṇu's cosmic striding as a metaphor for his attempt to encompass with his writing the vast complexity and multiplicity that is 'Hinduism'. In his introduction he describes the sacred Viṣṇu-pada stone of Gaya, said to show one of Viṣṇu's footprints as he placed his three steps that encompassed the three worlds. As a 'negative' impression left by a 'positive' divine being, the stone image serves as both a metonym for the entirety of Viṣṇu and as a symbol – a sign that both points elsewhere and contains meaning within itself – of Viṣṇu, his protective and supportive nature, his power to overcome adversity and so on (Glucklich, pp. 3–6). This rock footprint image *impression* serves as a useful starting point for us here as well, in considering Hindu iconology as the *expression* of meaning through physically visible images and objects that may or may not show anthropomorphic characteristics.

In the case of the Viṣṇu-pada stone, the foot-like impression is associated with a narrative that is recounted in numerous variations, beginning with the

Ṛgveda and continuing into various Purāṇas. As there are variations in the narrative, so there are varied meanings drawn from the story, all of which may be associated with the Viṣṇu-pada stone and with any number of anthropomorphic representations of Viṣṇa as the 'Widestrider' (urukrama). Conversely, what is recorded in the iconographic record may over time change or even lose meanings, especially if they are not articulated textually (see, for example, Hawley 1987).

In general, when speaking of Hindu images as 'meaningful', we are recognizing a mode of awareness or understanding that is characterized by the metaphor, or the mode of speech that carries meaning across a gap between two domains of thought. As we can speak of linguistic imagery, we may also find ourselves amidst 'image wordry'when it comes to Indic iconography: Images carry meanings across visual thought-domains. In doing so, they hold great power, a truth articulated in one Purāṇic originary account of the beautiful Apsaras, Urvaśī: When ten charming Apsarases approached the great ascetic sages Nara and Nārāyaṇa, the latter saw through their corruptive intentions. With mango juice he proceeded to paint the form of a woman on his own thigh – a form that instantly came to life as a woman so stunningly attractive that the Apsarases immediately left in shame (P. D. Mukherji, pp. 8–10; *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* I.129.1–15). This account of Urvaśī's coming to life from a painting highlights an important theme in Hindu reflection on iconography, namely its inherent power to not merely carry meaning by representation or imitation, but also by *becoming* what is represented, taking on the characteristics of a living (super)human being. In the story, the Apsarases' power to divert ascetics from their austerities is a dangerous power that is upstaged by an even greater power of an image that is even more attractive (but, in this case, not dangerous to the ascetic, having been generated by him).

That images hold both attractive and dangerous power (Miles, p. 167), especially due to a sense of 'nondifference' or fusion between image and referent, may contribute to two responses to or reasoning about images, one iconoclastic, the other functionalistic, with the one sometimes shading into the other: The iconoclastic response in India has been most pronounced historically by representatives of Islamic culture. But also more or less within the fold of Hindu traditions there have been reactions against iconographic representation of divinity that may take the philosophical form of non-dualism (*advaita-vāda*) that denies any 'personal' attributes in ultimate reality (Brahman). This reaction shades into the functionalistic understanding, whereby images are mere representations that function to provisionally support meditational or worship practices. This is a notion widely held today among the Indian elite, and recent scholarship questions whether the supposed dominance of this attitude in India is a true picture of how people more generally understand sacred images (Tarabout). According to a common conception among scholars, Hindu religious

elites (brahmins) gradually accommodated the image worship practices of lower classes, theologically justifying this move by granting functional value to the practice of viewing and worshipping images. In this view (perhaps in its classical form best articulated by the eighth-century philosopher Śaṅkara), human (especially lower class) inability to grasp the formlessness of Brahman is mitigated by a visible image that inspires, focuses and thus levers the mind beyond form to formless transcendence. Gilles Tarabout questions the predominance of such an attitude among Hindus in India by noting that, taken as whole, the majority of objects of worship are *not* anthropomorphic images, and that the predominance of anthropomorphic images are found among brahmins – those who supposedly concede their value mainly or only for the 'weak-minded' (lower classes).

Whether or not anthropomorphic images are seen as merely functional or as actual presences of divinity, Hindu sacred images as well as images of a more illustrative nature (as in the profuse iconography clothing the exterior surfaces of temples) must be seen as efforts by singular or, more typically, collective agents, to *express* enduring truths through human or human-like forms. As Mary Douglas has noted, '[t]he body . . . provides the basic scheme for all symbolism' (Douglas, p. 193), and Hindu iconography embraces and celebrates this connection by bringing into the immediacy and concreteness of bodily physicality a vast range of meanings involving human and divine desire, love, power, wisdom, folly and the entire gamut of human emotions (see Holdrege, 2013, *passim*).

That sacred images reflect or express truths for Hindus has a converse theme, namely, in the context of modern history, the *making* of history by images. Christopher Pinney asks, and then answers with his study in the affirmative: 'Can one have a history of images that treats pictures as more than simply a reflection of something else, something more important happening elsewhere? Is it possible to envisage history as in part determined by struggles occurring at the level of the visual?' (Pinney, p. 8). In his effort to make 'not a history of art, but a history made by art' (ibid.) Pinney concentrates on chromolithographic prints from the late 1870s onwards. Similarly revealing studies could surely be done with earlier 'art' that could show how, say, a particular stone image of Viṣṇu, or the collective images of a temple to Viṣṇu, propelled a certain notion of religiosity that affirmed a particular notion of kingship. It might be just this sort of intention that has driven the extensive study of the Vaikuṇṭha Perumāl temple near Chennai by Dennis Hudson (2008) in which he demonstrates a complex relationship among the bass-relief stone panels of this temple, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* text, and the royal power under which the temple was commissioned.

Direction of causality in history, especially in South Asia typically a troublesome issue, may be relevant in considering relationships of texts and images. It is generally thought that much South Indian early religious poetry (both

Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva) descriptively celebrates particular temple images, though specific connections can be questioned. Still, there are rich traditions of poetry in praise of specific temple images that are clearly existent by the time of composition (see, for example, Steven Hopkins, *passim*). And it is also well known that poetry becomes the inspiration for visual image making, as in the case of paintings illustrative of the twelfth-century *Gītagovinda* of Jayadeva (Dehejia, pp. 41–5, 78, 116, 118). One may ask: what is the relationship of such paintings to the verbal descriptions (often quite 'visual' in character) that inspired them, and how does the 'reading' of the painting effect one's reading of the text (and vice-versa)?

The articulation of meanings in or with respect to images are, in Hindu contexts, often done by religious adepts – gurus, sādhus, *sannyāsīs* – who themselves may become the objects of iconographic rendering, display, and (as will be discussed in the next section of this article), worship (see for example Beckerlegge). Photo technology has especially facilitated the propogation of guru imagery, vastly expanding the reach and presence of Hindu iconography, which is now to be displayed among all classes of Hindus, from the lowly motor-rickshaw driver with his vehicle sporting a photo of his favoured guru, to the wealthiest corporate manager hanging a picture of his guru prominently in his wood-panelled office.

The comparison of such guru images to images of divinities is, within the context of Hindu iconographic interpretation, by no means far-fetched, for there is an extensive theological tradition that places the spiritual guide more or less on a par with the deity whom the guide teaches his or her disciple to worship. Just how these theological relationships become iconographically articulated becomes a subject of potentially interesting inquiry.

Finally, on the subject of the comparative approach to Hindu iconography, there is – to begin from the 'outside' – the relatively untouched field of cross-cultural comparison. Here an admittedly far-fetched potential comparison may suffice to indicate both the possibility and the challenges of such enterprise to make meaningful comparisons that enrich our understanding of both elements of comparison and of the idea or theme with respect to which comparison is made. Is it possible, for example, to make an illuminating comparison (or contrast) between an Andhra Pradesh image of Narasiṁha killing the demon Hiranyakaśipu on his lap with an Italian *pietá* figure of St. Maria mourning her son Jesus' death on her lap? What would constitute sufficient commonality between these images, or what more would be necessary than simply the shared configuration of a dead figure on the lap of a living figure, to bring these two together into the same comparative 'space' in a meaningful way?

Moving 'inward' to within Indic traditions broadly and Hindu traditions more narrowly, the theme of comparitive Hindu iconography may profit from A. K. Rāmānujan's (1989) exploration of reflexivity or 'intertextuality' within

Indian literary texts. As these typically reflect and refract other literary texts in multiple ways, so Hindu images of gods and goddesses (or their combinations, or of venerated gurus or even political figures) reflect and refract other images to sustain a 'dense inter-ocularity' (Pinney, 1997: 190; Ramaswamy, p. xiv) – sometimes imitating, other times countering what has come before, or else incorporating and *multiplying* features (multiple arms or multiple heads especially becoming routine practices – see for example Maxwell). Multiplication of bodily features within one image is akin to another important theme in the comparative approach to Hindu iconology, namely *replication*. An important temple image, such as the Venkateśvara image of Viṣṇu at Tirumala (Andhra Pradesh) is consciously copied in countless smaller and miniature forms for votaries' homes; identical brass images of Kṛṣṇa (in several sizes from finger-length to waist-height, in 'threefold-bending pose') displayed for purchase at shops in Vrindavan and Mathura; and there is the ubiquitous calendar art of mass-printed devotional images of every conceivable Hindu deity. All such cases of replication serve to affirm for the images' votaries that the divinity portrayed is, by thus appearing, merely affirming his or her omnipotence: For the devotee, God can be fully present in a mass-produced image just as easily as anywhere else.

Ritual Approaches

This third approach to Hindu iconology arguably focuses on what is most characteristically 'Hindu' about images, namely, that they are more or less central to ritual action, or 'worship'. Hence one speaks of the various 'cults' that revolve around particular deities or particular images, which are situated in temples of all sizes throughout the Indian subcontinent and, increasingly, in other parts of the world. The cult of Jagannātha (in Purī, Orissa), for example, brings together by the hundreds an assemblage of brahmin and Dayita priests, cooks and various sorts of administrators and supporting staff for the worship and maintenance of a grand temple complex that receives thousands of pilgrims and local worshippers daily. Since several centuries all this is richly choreographed in a variety of ways with the understanding that Jagannātha ('Cosmic Lord') is the ruling king of the region. He (considered to be Kṛṣṇa manifest in wooden form) is attentively bathed, dressed, ornamented, garlanded, sumptuously fed (following exact vegetarian recipes) and offered lustrations and prayers, according to a daily schedule embellished by frequent festival observances that follow an annual lunar calendar.

This is but one, albeit major, temple among thousands where similar if less elaborate ritual practices are conducted, in the context of a spectrum of understandings about the nature of the images that are the 'objects' of these practices.

Two important loci within this spectrum can be specified by the terms *bhakti* and *Tantra,* both of which designate important currents in and well beyond Hindu streams of religiosity or spirituality. Within the bhakti current, images are not mere images, but rather living presences of a (or the) divinity, who makes him or herself thus accessible to devotees (see for example Bennett). 'Easy accessibility' (*saulabhya*) in turn facilitates reciprocation that, in its preferred form, has no ulterior motivation on the part of worshippers than the sheer pleasure of the divinity, and the eventual (generally posthumous) entry into the non-temporal realm of the deity. For the *bhakta* (devotee), the various practices centred on the image are services rendered in the spirit of providing bodily comfort and pleasure, all of which culminate in *darśana* – the attentive seeing or gazing upon the image accompanied by the understand that the viewing devotee is *being seen,* and thus blessed, by the deity (see for example Eck). Consequently, in terms of iconography, most crucial to the bhakti modality of relating to a sacred image are the image's eyes which, in elaborate rituals of image consecration, will be ritually 'opened' by uncovering and daubing them with honey, after which the deity (now understood to be fully present) is 'shown' various auspicious items. But also important may be the overall form of the image and its particular features, whereby dress and ornamentation can be an attractive component to *darśana*: Devotees visit their favourite temple, often daily, to see how the image is dressed from one day to the next.

Tantra, the other major stream of ritual practice in Hindu traditions, is typically intermingled with aspects of the bhakti stream, but its characteristic features in terms of interaction with images are an emphasis on empowerment and identification. The deity is approached by a worshipper with rituals and meditations of identification whereby the deity's presence may be, with the aid of the image properly meditated upon, 'transferred' into the heart of the Tantric worshipper, or the worshipper meditatively transfers the deity *from* his or her heart 'into' an image for receiving 'external' worship before being transferred back into the heart. In terms of iconography, it may be fair to say that the paradigmatic image is the geometrical diagram or *yantra* – usually two-dimensional but also three-dimensional (and in the latter case, it can be a temple proper, designed with the idea of replicating a sacred mountain, especially Mount Meru). And closely coupled with the *yantra* is, typically, the invocation of *mantra,* as a 'sound-form' of the deity (Zimmer, *passim*).

In both contexts of ritual focus on one or more images, prescriptive texts for image consecration (*prāṇa-pratiṣṭha*) such as are found in Pañcarātra literature, represent the most extensive and complex elaboration of rites enjoined for bringing the deity forth into the image. Here iconographic differences, such as whether an image/deity is of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa (or a related *avatāra*), or of Śiva or some other deity, is of minimal consequence in terms of over-all procedure; rather, difference will be in terms of mantras invoked, which are, as mentioned

above, understood to be the sound-form of the given deity. But what is noteworthy about image consecration in this context is its all-encompassing character: In effect, 'everyone and everything' is made ritually present to bless the occasion and to serve as purifying agents in the ritual bathing of the image. All gods and sages are invoked, and all sacred waters and auspicious liquids are gathered, in a spectacle of totalization whereby the process of divinization may be seen as a cosmic 'implosion' that functions as a 'hologram' of the cosmic whole (Waghorne and Cutler, pp. 163–4) in which all forms are drawn together to effectively constitute the one image being consecrated. Even the temporal dimension participates in this process, for the rituals of consecration begin (in the most elaborate prescriptions) long before the concluding procedures, with the locating, transporting and sculpting of a (usually stone) image. And long after consecration, rituals of renewal may be performed, typically in an extensive annual festival or once in several years (as with Jagannātha, when every twelve to nineteen years in the *nava-kalevara* rite the wooden image is replaced).

But the invocation of a deity into a material image may also be seen in relation to the phenomenon of ritual possession, a theme that is also relevant to iconology. As previously suggested – that religious adepts become objects of iconographic representation – in a further extension of relationships between physical form and divinity there is the fairly widespread *practice* of divine possession, whereby often at 'scheduled' times, a deity (whether embodied in a physical image, or loosely associated with a shrine or similar location) is experienced as entering into one or several persons, who then become temporary living embodiments of the given deity and who then become themselves objects of worship by others (Stephen Inglis, pp. 89–101 in Waghorne and Cutler).

Ritual approaches to iconology focus on the notion of participation: Persons interact with images and see themselves in relation to images. In this context it may be appropriate to apply the question posed by W. J. T. Mitchell about pictures in general to Hindu iconography in particular, namely, 'What do pictures want?' In Hindu traditions this becomes not merely a figurative notion, in that images, understood as embodiments of divinity, are also presences with expectations or preferences that human agents place themselves in a position to fulfil.

Conclusion

I have suggested that fluidity is an important characteristic of Hindu iconography, and similarly the notion of *agency* can be of considerable service as an important principle contributing to a sense of what constitutes Hindu iconography. But we can hardly call such concepts definitive. In searching for what it is about Hindu iconography in general that makes it what it is – that

makes it 'Hindu' – one is tempted to fall back on a process of elimination and a dose of circularity: It is that which is *not* Buddhist, Jain, Christian or what have you, but which has South Asian provenance and is tied 'more or less' to venerative or meditative practices considered Hindu! As unsatisfactory as such a delineation may be, it helps as an initial circumscription that can be tested by specific instances. As for Hindu visual hermeneutics, the prospect of generalization is possibly even more daunting. Here one might resort to a spectrum of understandings, with atemporal transcendence at one extreme (largely following the thrust of Sanskritic textual interpretation) to appropriation for commercial (overtly material) purposes at the other extreme. That there is a tension between these two extremes is witnessed by the fact that instances of commercial appropriation are sometimes, in recent years, met with vehement demands for retraction by Hindu interest groups. But one generality may be of service, namely, that Hindu iconography attempts to occupy a space of visual meaning that suspends subject–object dichotomous understanding. This is not at all to say it is 'the same thing' as classical non-dualist Vedāntic or yogic pursuit of a state of consciousness that collapses subject and object. Rather, the Hindu image, once created (or once 'self-manifest') seeks a life of its own, but within a particular community of interpreters for whom there is never mere objectivity in a world of mere objects, and for whom subjectivity extends well beyond the parameters of the individual self. It is within this space that 'the divine in Hinduism . . . is fully visible' (Smith, p. 36).

We can end this short overview of Hindu iconology with a few suggestions of areas wherein further research might be done and better understandings developed.

Indigenous individual perceptions: To counterbalance and enrich the already extensive study of iconography throughout the Indian subcontinent and the similarly extensive work on early texts of all kinds related to iconography, there is a need for more attention to the ways that different sorts of persons who interact with images – especially images considered sacred – articulate their own understandings of these images. What sorts of experiences do pilgrims or regular visitors to a particular temple have of the presiding deity of that temple? What kinds of understanding do individual priests have of themselves in relation to the image(s) they attend? In what ways do artisans who make images for worship understand their roles in making images 'come alive'? (This latter question could be especially interesting with respect to Muslim artisans who make images for Hindu temples.) Such a direction of inquiry would be of service to the notion put forward by Wilfred Cantwell Smith, that amidst the record of human activity that makes up the 'cumulative tradition' of religion stand individual human beings, each with his or her faith expressed in, through or contrary to, aspects of that tradition, and it is these individuals who make, by their thoughts, words and actions, future developments of a tradition.

Exploring the permeability of religious boundaries: Hindu iconography and worship mark off a strong and apparently impermeable boundary with respect to Islam. In what ways might this boundary be actually or potentially more permeable? In relation to other traditions ('indigenous' religious traditions – Jainism and Buddhism, and also Sikhism, and 'non-indigenous' traditions – especially Christianity) what sorts of parallels or crossovers exist with respect to iconography and worship, either in practice or theory, potentially or actually? And where, with respect to such blurring of boundaries related to iconography or iconology and worship, does the term 'Hindu' become less or more useful? Further, what can be said about, and in what ways might be interesting or valuable, non-Hindu perceptions and articulations of Hindu iconography? Is there something from such articulations with respect to iconography that Hindus might value and learn from?

Iconographic evidence of shifts in contemporary Hinduism: As contemporary Hindu cultures and practices change in a rapidly changing world, visible evidence of changes can be seen in Hindu iconography (e.g. in the burgeoning of colossal images of Hanumān, Śiva and other deities in India; or in the mass reproduction of small images from synthetic materials, that are being produced in China; or in contemporary Western representations of Kālī). And again, taking Pinney's prompting, one might ask in what ways it can be seen that history is being made by contemporary Hindu art/iconography, rather than the other way around.

Effects of media/technology on Hindu iconography: Iconographic evidence of shifts in contemporary Hinduism is happening in a drastically changing and increasingly powerful media landscape. The Indian cinema industry found initial momentum in the production of 'mythologicals' based on the classical Indian epics, the *Rāmāyana* and the *Mahābhārata*, and such films seemed to 'bring to life' the deities otherwise experienced in stationary images within temples. How has this development (and television, and Internet, and indeed print technology), effected Hindu practices and thought? What new contours are manifesting in the 'cumulative tradition' we call Hinduism as a result of, for example, it being now possible to perform *pūjā* online to a deity in a temple thousands of miles away, and to order online ('Add to Cart') *prasāda* from a temple, or to have a ritual performed on behalf of oneself or a loved-one?

Iconographic controversies: Iconography of all religious traditions has been the site of controversy and conflict. This has also been the case in India, whether with respect to which deity a particular image is supposed to be, or to whom an image belongs or whether or not it is right to represent and worship divinities in concrete form. There have also been controversies internal to particular traditions of affiliation, such as whether a particular guru's picture or image should or should not be publically honoured, or even (as was recently hotly contested in one Vaiṣṇava tradition) whether a certain pre-modern saint should be represented with or without a beard!

Constructive theology and philosophy: In a different register of inquiry, Hindu iconology could be a springboard for broader reflection on images, especially in relation to the broad distinctions 'sacred' versus 'profane'. As W. J. T. Mitchell shows (1987, pp. 9–11), the rightful 'institutional discourses' for 'the notion of the image "as such" ' are philosophy and theology. Can the broader discourse about images be brought to bear on discussions involving Hindu iconography or iconology? And conversely, can Hindu philosophy and theology be brought to bear on the broader discourse about images? With respect to the latter possibility, what might be said, for example, with respect to David Chidester's question, 'So how did we ever get the modern idea of inanimate matter?' (Chidester, pp. 367–80), a question that could be interestingly juxtaposed with Western critiques of Hindu iconography and its religious contexts.

In relation to the current academic focus on the human body as instrument and carrier of cultural, psychological, social and other forms of knowledge, Hindu iconography becomes highly relevant as a resource for exploring Hindu conceptions of the body, and these conceptions in relation to practices that may or may not be seen as specifically 'Hindu' in character. In considering any one or several examples of Hindu iconography as body representation(s), it becomes especially important to keep in mind the question whether or to what extent such iconography is *constitutive* of surrounding social and political realities, as opposed to how they are illustrative and reflective of these realities (Ramaswamy, p. xiv).

Finally, we may ask how the study of Hindu iconography and iconological reflection may serve a deeper, more comprehensive understanding of Hinduism in general. Iconography is never in isolation from human producers and viewers, and whether one places it at the centre of inquiry or at its periphery, any one or any combination of the several themes of focus within this volume can be fruitfully considered with respect to physical and graphic imagery. And whether as the concretization of human ideas and emotions about the nature of ultimate reality, or as celebrations of physicality from which ideas and emotions are products, iconography and its interpretation will surely persist – and likely expand – as a vigorous locus of individual and collective experience and memory throughout the Hindu world.

Colonial Hinduism

Brian A. Hatcher

I fear I will date myself, but I remember in the early 1980s gathering in the living room of a fellow graduate student to discuss Edward Said's *Orientalism*

(1978), which had just begun to appear on our radar. Naturally we had to ask what Said's thesis would mean for our work on Hinduism and South Asia. At the time 'Orientalist' was just a somewhat archaic word for what we were training to become. If we were interested in nineteenth- or twentieth-century developments, we likely spoke of studying 'modern' Hinduism and if we invoked the word 'colonialism' it was more as a historical marker rather than as a critical lens through which to ask new questions about India.[175] A great deal of our reflection was still structured in terms of modernization theory, the tropes of renaissance, reform and revival, and the relationship between Indian 'awakening' and the nationalist 'movement'. Even if, in retrospect, we tend to think of this period as marking the dawn of Postcolonial Studies, it is clear that such approaches had not really begun to reshape the study of modern Hinduism. All that would change in fairly short order.

Said hadn't been the only development during the 'seventies that helped put colonialism and imperialism more squarely in the centre of scholarly reflection on Hinduism. As is now well known, by the mid-'seventies South Asian historians had grown critical of both standard bourgeois-nationalist and orthodox Marxist historical narratives. The almost exclusive attention paid by such histories to elite, English-educated reformers had become increasingly suspect, influenced both by contemporary radical political movements in India (e.g. Naxalism) and the rise to prominence of histories 'from below' (see Sarkar, 1997, p. 41). As a result, a new generation of leftist historians began casting doubt on India's so-called renaissance, not to mention pointing to the persistent problem of communalism and the fractures inherent in nationalist mobilization. Some books that came to us in the 1970s with older-sounding titles actually harboured essays that offered new and exciting work that emphasized the constraints placed upon reform within a colonial context. A good example would be C. H. Philips and M. D. Wainwright's *Indian Society and the Beginnings of Modernisation* (1976), which included Barun De's essay, 'The Colonial Context of the Bengal Renaissance'.[176]

In the 'eighties this sort of Marxist revisionist historiography joined up with Saidian critique and a rejection of the so-called Cambridge School of South Asian history (as developed in the work of Anil Seal and others) to produce the Subaltern Studies Collective. Since that time, Subaltern Studies has arguably become one of the most influential – and most intensely debated – initiatives in South Asian historiography.[177] Morphing over time from a rejection of elite historiography in the name of peasant consciousness into a series of reflections on the same educated, middle-class reformers who had been the focus of earlier trends in history writing, the work of the collective is far too diffuse and contested to address here. In his introduction to a valuable selection of essays on Subaltern Studies, David Ludden notes that the nature of changes occurring within the overall project may even at times seem ambiguous. But Ludden

suggests that if we think in terms of a 'complex history of reading and writing' taking place both within the collective and in external opposition to it, then we can better appreciate how 'outside forces molded the project itself' just as 'its own institutional boundaries have always been permeable' (2001, p. 3).[178] As we shall see below, the collective's work has been crucial for reorienting reflection on colonial India, even if Subaltern Studies as a whole has taken very little overt interest in religion or Hinduism per se.

In the same critical environment of the 'eighties important attempts were made by the likes of C. A. Bayly (1983) and Sumit Sarkar (1985) to re-conceptualize the relationship between colonial and precolonial India, suggesting the need to revisit commonplace assumptions about the 'modernity' of colonial Hinduism. At the same time the hermeneutics of the encounter between India and Europe were tackled in distinctive ways by Wilhelm Halbfass (1988) and Tapan Raychaudhuri (1988). Working out of the Subaltern Studies movement, Partha Chatterjee inspired reflection on the relationship between European modernity and anti-colonial movements, fueling investigation into the relationship between Indian nationalism and majoritarian Hindu discourse. Eventually we got to the point where the *The Modernity of Tradition* (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1967) had to give way to *The Invention of Tradition* (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983). And so, one might say, the stage was properly set for the study of *colonial* Hinduism.

By the 'nineties, as the problem of colonialism came into sharper focus, it became possible for the first time to explore the possibility that Hinduism was perhaps not the long-standing religious tradition presumed by European Orientalists, missionaries and Romantics alike. More striking still was the suggestion that Hinduism might in fact be a colonial invention. Suddenly scholars began to ask whether – or to what degree – the very category of Hinduism was the product of the combined forces of British Orientalism, Christian missionary discourse, Enlightenment rationalism and European Romanticism (see Sontheimer, 1989 for an important early collection of essays). Important studies by Ronald Inden (1990) and Richard King (1999) helped synthesize post-Saidian reflection as it related to the study of India and helped ensure that from here on the study of Hinduism would entail the study of colonial Hinduism, and vice-versa. Recent publications confirm that the question of defining Hinduism is now intimately connected to the scrutiny of colonial developments (see Pennington, 2005 and Sugirtharaja, 2008).

To be sure, not everyone has signed on to the 'invention of Hinduism' thesis nor have they agreed on how to address the relative roles played in the process of invention by hegemonic European voices as opposed to Indian intellectuals and reformers (for a sampling of the debate, including influential essays by David Lorenzen, Robert Frykenberg and Mary Searle-Chatterjee, see Llewellyn, 2005). Just as importantly, the precise scholarly genealogy for what we might

alternatively call the 'colonial construction' argument can itself be debated. To the list of developments reviewed thus far, Gauri Viswanathan would add three more: the rise of Hindu nationalist parties in the 1990s; the contributions of feminist scholarship on India; and the role of formerly marginalized groups like Dalit communities in rejecting elite Hindu depictions of Indian culture (Viswanathan, 2003, p. 30).

Viswanathan's goal in adding these three factors into the mix is important for what it suggests about the politics of knowledge in this context. She hopes to reject any facile conclusion that scholarship on colonial Hinduism is merely a derivative of Western academic fads and fashions. For her there is a real and valid reference point for this scholarship in the political landscape of post-colonial Indian secularism and democratic politics (2003, p. 31).[179]

What remains the case is that as a reflection of over thirty years of intensive scholarship on South Asian history, society, politics, gender and religion, the study of *colonial* Hinduism has now achieved something like the status of a recognized scholarly category, as evidenced most clearly by the existence of this very chapter. More narrowly, the slightly more prescriptive rubric of the 'colonial construction Hinduism' also appears to have taken hold, if one may judge from such works as Gauri Viswanathan's essay, 'Colonialism and the Construction of Hinduism', in the *Blackwell Companion to Hinduism* (2003) and a recent volume entitled *Rethinking Religion in India: The Colonial Construction of Hinduism* (Bloch et al., 2010).[180]

For the study and teaching of Hinduism, it does now seem that whether we choose to begin with a consideration of the Indus Valley civilization or with reflection on medieval bhakti movements, we must in either case begin not only by addressing the way these topics reflect the imprint of the colonial era but also by acknowledging how these apparently remote historical eras continue to do real work in contemporary South Asian political discourse and practice. If we are to consider the Indus Valley we must wrestle with the disciplinary project of imperial archaeology while also attending to the arguments of contemporary Hindu nationalist ideologues and proponents of the 'indigenous Aryan' thesis; likewise, when we consider the history of Hindu bhakti we have to pay due attention to the formative role played by colonial authorities like H. H. Wilson, George Grierson and Monier Monier-Williams while keeping in mind the subsequent mobilization of bhakti saints within nationalist and post-colonial political discourse (see Pinch, 2003 and Hawley, 2007).[181] Viewed in this light, it is difficult not to conclude that colonial Hinduism has come to provide the Archimedean point from which to do much of the heavy lifting when it comes to thinking about Hinduism.

If we are indeed now witnessing the fixing of a particular (and particularly potent) scholarly paradigm, it naturally makes sense to ask not only the inevitable critical questions (e.g. What might be left out of the picture? What might

be distorted by this critical lens?), but also the equally important question of where we might go next. As for the critical questions, these have been in play for some time now. There is no need here to rehearse the scholarly reception of Said's Orientalism, postmodern historiography, postcolonial theory or Subaltern Studies, each of which has fostered its own cottage industry of criticism.[182] Frustrations with Said's depiction of Western scholarship on Asia, the slipperiness of discourse theory, the relentless binaries of postcolonial historiography and the theoretical pitfalls of isolating (or essentializing) subaltern consciousness are all well enough known to readers. While one might say this has all led to a fair amount of epistemological anxiety (van der Veer, 2007), one might also say that these critical questions actually frame what it means to study Hinduism today – as evidenced by a book like Richard King's *Orientalism and Religion* (1999). Indeed, any poor soul who had been kept in suspended animation since reading R. Z. Zaehner's *Hinduism* (1962), would be shocked upon awaking to learn that the study of Hinduism was now parsed in terms of categories like romanticism, orientalism, nationalism, ethnosociology, gender, colonialism and postcolonialism (see Mittal and Thursby, 2008).

Instead of taking the (sometimes necessary, but not always pleasant) detour into the gathering meta-discourse on colonial Hinduism, I would like to use the remainder of this chapter to focus on some selected examples of recent scholarship from a variety of disciplinary vantage points to suggest what seem to me fruitful avenues to pursue. I will limit myself to three basic themes: (1) colonial Hinduism and Religious Studies; (2) the promise of new questions emerging from new archives; and (3) the need to globalize colonial Hinduism. Of necessity these themes intersect in important ways, as readers will hopefully discover.

1. Colonial Hinduism and Religious Studies

As we have seen, one of the most influential developments in South Asian history over the past three decades has been the rise and proliferation of Subaltern Studies. Yet one of the most interesting aspects of the manifold contributions of this collective is its strange relationship to the topic of religion. As Christian Novetzke has noted, religion appears to be central to a great deal of Subaltern theorizing; indeed religion has been invoked as constitutive of Subaltern consciousness, especially in its resistance to domination. Simultaneously, the collective has encouraged us to see religion as a powerful tool employed within elite discourse to oppress the subaltern – whether that elite is the European colonizer or the indigenous learned class.

For all this, Novetzke suggests that religion remains a real 'blind spot' for the Subaltern Studies Collective (2006, p. 125). As he sees it, while such scholars are 'deeply invested' in finding agency in religious belief (p. 124), they seem

unwilling or ill-equipped to theorize religion. In the work of Partha Chatterjee, for instance, religion is removed to a place outside of history, to the inner, spiritual world (1993). Here it lurks, in a sense, inscrutable. But Novetzke finds in this a curious paradox:

> If subaltern consciousness is regularly expressed through religion yet religion reinforces the oppression of the subaltern (by 'sanctifying' their degraded status), then it becomes problematic to read the expression of religion as an instantiation of insurgency or rebellion. On the contrary, when religion is invoked, subaltern status is reinforced. (Novetzke, 2006, p. 111)

Perhaps the one member of the collective who appears to have offered a way forward is Dipesh Chakrabarty (though he has by now transcended any narrow sense of Subaltern party affiliation). Novetzke takes Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe* (2000), as an example of the attempt to take religion (or more narrowly, the supernatural) seriously as a mode of human agency.

Novetzke finds in Chakrabarty's attempt an occasion to propose a way forward that would be more directly grounded in the field of Religious Studies. He proposes that what the Subalterns need is a way to speak of 'numinous history' (p. 123). Here he invokes the now-classic study of Rudolf Otto on 'the holy'. If supernatural agency appears to be 'an impassable limit point' to the Subalterns, Novetzke argues that Otto's concept of the numinous may provide some help (2006, p. 122). In the conclusion to *The Idea of the Holy* Otto writes that 'religion is only the offspring of history in so far as history on the one hand develops our disposition for knowing the holy, and on the other is itself repeatedly the manifestation of the holy' (Otto, pp. 176–7). Novetzke comments on this passage:

> In many of the narratives consulted by scholars of the Subaltern Studies Collective regarding the motivations of peasant insurgency, we hear that religion has entered into the streams of history by enacting its own agency, by acting through people . . . ; history is the proof of religious belief. And this action, if we are to accept the Subaltern Studies Collective's important search for nonelite historiography, literally brings subaltern history into being. The noted resistance by subalterns to analyze or explain their actions beyond recourse to something like Otto's numen is the by-product of its nature as *sui generis*. There is nothing to explain, on the subalterns' part, since they are within the course of history, their history, the history of their religion made manifest in the world. (Novetzke, 2006, p. 123)

For Novetzke a non-reductive, descriptive method for addressing religious behaviour is precisely the tool needed to make sense of the 'ineffable but positive agency' of the subaltern (Novetzke, 2006, p. 126). By supplementing Chakrabarty with Otto, Novetzke thus suggests that Religious Studies might in fact provide a crucial set of tools for addressing religious modes of being in the world.

Whether or not one endorses Novetzke's proposal to advance Otto as a critical tool for theorizing religion in the twenty-first century, what makes his proposal significant in the present context is that it amounts to an attempt to bring two major theoretical programmes into conversation – programmes that have hitherto not always paid equal attention to one another. Certainly, most scholars of colonial Hinduism today would acknowledge that their research has been shaped by developments originating from the Subaltern Studies Collective. But by the same token it will not have escaped the notice of those working in Religious Studies how little of their work has had an equivalent impact upon the theorizing of South Asian history. If we are prepared to commit to examining new directions for scholarship on colonial Hinduism, then one initiative must surely involve an attempt to find common ground in this area.

Even if recent critical trends within the realm of Religious Studies have provided serious reasons for viewing non-reductive theories of religion produced in the modern West with a great deal of suspicion, Novetzke might well reply with the simple question: But what is it that we in Religious Studies can bring to the study of colonial Hinduism, if not theories of religion that can amplify, complement or complete accounts generated from other disciplinary sites? In this respect alone, Novetzke's efforts deserve some follow-up. There can be no excuse for perpetuating a situation in which South Asian historians shun explicit theorizing about religion while scholars of religion in South Asia shy away from challenging developments in the field of history. Perhaps the appearance in a recent issue of the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* of a review essay by Dipesh Chakrabarty devoted to Charles Taylor's *Secular Age* is one positive sign of a rapprochement between these two important disciplinary frameworks (Chakrabarty, 2009).

The irony – no doubt not lost on Novetzke – is that just as he proposes bringing Otto into the conversation, the same general trends that have inspired contemporary developments in Subaltern Studies and postcolonial theory, have worked to unsettle the very project of Religious Studies. From Timothy Fitzgerald and Russell McCutcheon to Talal Asad and Tomoko Masuzawa, the critical history of Religious Studies has worked to 'provincialize religion' as a particular product of modern European (Protestant) Christianity and to problematize the once-unproblematic notions of secularism and pluralism. While

we must indeed offer South Asian historians the tools of Religious Studies, we should not lose sight of the fact that some of the most exciting work in Religious Studies is being done by those who would challenge the very *sui generis* claims promoted by the likes of Otto. Perhaps the key will lie in advancing the two critical agendas in closer harmony, using colonial Hinduism yet again as a crucial fulcrum upon which to rest the twin levers of history and religion. Regarding such a critical merger, Novetzke and Laurie Patton are surely correct when they suggest that 'The next generation of scholars of South Asia would greatly benefit from the mutual critique and enlightenment that would be sure to ensue' (in Mittal and Thursby, 2008, p. 393).

2. New Archives, New questions

There can be no doubt that the developments of the past three decades have provided crucial incentives to dive into the colonial archives in search of evidence both to support the 'colonial construction' thesis and to revisit and refine some developing truisms about Hinduism and colonialism. While early critiques inspired by Said went in search of archival evidence to demonstrate the textualization and misrepresentation of South Asian religions under conditions of European hegemony, it was not long before scholars interested in the colonial construction of Hinduism began asking after the role of 'Indian agency', understood both in terms of collaboration with and resistance to the British imperial agenda. Here again the work of Bayly has been an important influence (on this see Pinch, 1999). There have been at least three important dimensions to such work.

First, a growing concern to problematize existing historical models has necessitated developing more complex ways to think about what had until the 1970s been construed in terms of mono-directional impact or 'modernization'. With the rise of cultural studies and postcolonial theory, new historiographic models began to invoke fluid and interactive notions of transculturation, dialogue, convergence, eclecticism and hybridity (see Pratt, 1992; Irschick, 1994; Hatcher, 1996 and 1999; Bhabha, 1994; Raychaudhuri, 1988).

Second, as I have noted, the same concerns fostered a greater interest in demonstrating the active role played by South Asian actors in the construction of colonial institutions, policies and practices. As a result Hinduism has come to be recognized not simply as a European concoction, but as more of a joint project of colonial officials, missionaries and Orientalists working alongside, in tandem with, or under the influence of, a range of South Asian actors like pandits, munshis, native converts, court poets, English-educated reformers and modern-age swamis (Hatcher, 1996; Peabody, 2003; Pinch, 2003; Dodson, 2007).

Thirdly, in order to better document the activities associated with this expanded cast of characters – and to better map the vectors of interaction among a now more complex field of actors and institutions – scholars have revised their idea of what constituted the colonial archive. In keeping with the rise of such disciplines as cultural studies, postcolonialism, feminist theory and visual culture, the idea of where one might look and what one might look for has been vastly expanded; from a narrow focus on print histories, government records and political papers, scholars have begun to explore such things as diaries, domestic manuals, poster art and calendar prints, missionary archives, museum collections, memoirs and newspapers (see, for instance, Babb and Wadley, 1997; Burton, 2003; Pinney, 2004; Walsh, 2005; Bauman, 2008).[183] The opening up of diverse archives and new media with the aid of recent critical tools has at times helped to throw received theoretical constructs into question. Indeed, if one reviews developments in the areas of gender, family and colonial law, it becomes clear that the past twenty years have yielded amazing rewards.

The ′eighties and ′nineties witnessed the appearance of a range of important studies of women, education and social change (see Borthwick, 1984; Metcalf, 1984; Forbes, 1996; Minault, 1998). To the framework provided by feminist theory were soon added the insights of postcolonial theory, especially more concerted reflection on the construction of gender in Orientalist and nationalist thought (Mani, 1998; Sinha, 1995). Such scholarship has increasingly dovetailed with focused investigations of colonial law and the changing norms of property rights, conjugal relations, civil law and even the articulation of emotion and desire (Chatterjee, 1999; T. Sarkar, 2001; Agnes, 2001; Oldenburg, 2002; Rajan, 2003). Recent work on colonial law has benefited especially from the critical lens of legal pluralism, which has encouraged scholars to integrate the study of colonial law more directly into the history of colonial Hindu religion and culture (see Benton, 1999; Kugle, 2001; Williams, 2006 and Davis, 2010).

Operating in the background of much of this recent work has been Partha Chatterjee's well-known thesis regarding women, the domestic and the inner domain of the nation (1993). While Chatterjee's work has encouraged more intensive reflection on gender and Indian nationalism, it has also proven to be a useful foil against which to advance alternate historical interpretations. For his part, Chatterjee had emphasized the discursive role played by the realm of the private/spiritual in the construction of elite Hindu self-assertion. However, others such as Tanika Sarkar have sought to provide more historically detailed accounts, attentive to 'actual men and women engaged in concrete activities and relationships' as opposed to abstractions and 'reified structures' (Sarkar, 2001, p. 3). Sarkar's suspicion of facile notions like the 'Victorian home' (Sarkat, 2001, p. 37) has helped to encourage new studies

attuned to particular transformations taking place in the political economy of late-colonial India as well as to the global flow of bourgeois ideologies of domesticity (see Bhattacharya, 2005; Sinha, 2006).

A reflection of such developments can be seen in an influential collection of essays edited by Indrani Chatterjee (2004), dedicated to examining the family not as a static ideological construct but in its historical and regional complexity. Here again, due attention is paid to exploring a range of archives, including court records and kinship narratives, while also addressing linguistic differences across India's regions. What emerges is a paradigm of deeply contextualized historical research demonstrating the possibility that families acted as 'agents of change' in colonial India and not just as 'sanctuaries from it' (Chatterjee, 2004, p. 21).

All of these trends and achievements are similarly visible in Mytheli Sreenivas's monograph, *Wives, Widows, and Concubines* (2008). Grounded in a thorough study of court rulings, proceedings of women's conferences, newspapers and government reports, Sreenivas postulates a rich 'Tamil family imaginary' through which colonial Tamils 'could make sense of, and transform, their society' (Sreenivas, 2008, p. 17). Here we see a theoretically informed attempt to open up new archives that in turn results in 'a critical framework for deconstructing the implied identification of "family" with religious community and nation' (Sreenivas, 2008, p. 17). Students of colonial Hinduism will need to address the ways such new critical frameworks for thinking about the family in colonial India can help advance our thinking not just about the nature of modern Hinduism, but about the postcolonial embodiment of Hindutva and Indian nationalism more generally.

Before leaving this section, in keeping with the theme of exploring new archives, let me add a plea for an equivalent investment in making new translations from the regional literatures of South Asia. In a recent essay, John Nemec has asked pointedly why we had to wait until 2005 to get a scholarly translation of Bankimchandra's *Anandamath* (Nemec, 2009, p. 769). The point is well taken. There can be few authors of the late nineteenth century who have been more frequently invoked as marking an important turning point in colonial Hindu consciousness; indeed, Bankimchandra has figured prominently in widely cited works by the likes of Partha Chatterjee (1993), Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) and Tanika Sarkar (2001). But it was not until Julius Lipner brought out his *Anandamath, or the Sacred Brotherhood* that students and researchers had a carefully researched and sophisticated translation of this major work upon which they might base future study (Lipner, 2005).

While India's classical Sanskrit literature has received far greater attention when it comes to translation (a fact, too, that reminds us of the lingering legacy of European conceptualizations of India's 'riches'), there are literally worlds of

material in the regional vernaculars awaiting scholarly attention. To call for a more intensive investment in studying India's vernacular literatures is not necessarily a new development (witness the important volume edited by Kenneth Jones in 1992).[184] But Nemec is right: 'A . . . tremendous range of historically significant texts remains ripe for translation from without the canon of works produced in Sanskrit' (Nemec, 2009, p. 769).

Not surprisingly, colonial Bengali elites like Bankimchandra and Michael Madhusudan Dutt continue to attract the attention of translators (see Harder, 2001 and Seely, 2004, respectively). But it is encouraging to note new translations of other sorts of literature in Bengali, such as Kālī poetry (McDermott, 2001), the songs of the Kartabhajas (Urban, 2001b), and some little-known discourses of the Tattvabodhini Sabha (Hatcher, 2008), while Meera Kosambi's translations of Pandita Ramabai's Marathi writings (Kosambi, 2000) remind us there are valuable resources to be found in the other colonial vernaculars.

3. Globalizing Colonial Hinduism

The rewards of moving past some of the binaries – metropole/colony, colonizer/colonized, domination/resistance, elite/subaltern, etc. – that quickly became fashionable with the rise of postcolonial studies and its concern with the hegemony of 'colonial knowledge' (as in Cohn, 1985) are now becoming apparent in a wide range of scholarship informed by an emphasis on the global and the transnational. Such scholarship tends to employ a decidedly new lexicon to tackle the dynamics of political, intellectual and cultural change in the early modern and modern eras. That lexicon is structured overall by the fluid logic of interconnectivity, rather than the rigid structure of binaries. Hence we find more significant critical work being done by words like 'web', 'circulation', 'network', 'maps' and 'movement'. Taken as a whole, this new lexicon seems to be challenging the kind of thinking enshrined in an earlier vocabulary of 'encounter', 'domination', 'exchange' and 'displacement'.[185]

New historiography, questioning the received wisdom of post-World War II area studies, has begun thinking less in terms of national boundaries and more in terms of transnational regions and world systems. For instance, by focusing on the Indian Ocean rim instead of the Middle East or South Asia in isolation, scholars have begun to reveal the complex webs of trade, commerce and cultural practice that have linked places like Baghdad, Bombay and Batavia for at least the last several centuries. Commenting on the benefits of such an 'interregional' approach, Sugata Bose has remarked that while 'micro-approaches' like Subaltern Studies may have been successful at calling attention to 'marginal

actors', they have 'been overall a little too engrossed in discourses of the local community and the nation to engage in broader comparisons'. There is, by contrast, a pressing need 'to render permeable and then creatively trespass across rather rigidly drawn external boundaries' (Bose, 2006, pp. 7–10).[186]

In this spirit Bose re-examines the lives of 'expatriate patriots' like Gandhi and Subhas Chandra Bose, not to mention a poet like Rabindranath Tagore, all of whose careers we can scarcely conceptualize without invoking notions of transnational movement and concomitant expressions of cosmopolitan identity. At one point Bose takes us briefly to a meeting in support of the Indian National Army held in 1943 at the Chettiar temple in Singapore. We are told that Subhas Chandra Bose refused to eat at the gathering unless members of all castes and communities were welcome (Bose, 2006, p. 142). One might be tempted to discount the venue and focus instead on the event in terms of the narrative of Indian nationalism. But the event reminds us that the narrative of Indian patriotism cannot be confined to the boundaries of the Indian nation; at the same time, it speaks to the legacy of South Indian Hindu migration in the Indian Ocean. The Singapore Chettiar temple represents a special kind of 'globalized locality', using terminology employed by Joanne Waghorne in her study of middle-class religion, migration and Hindu temple building. Like Sugata Bose, Waghorne offers us an opportunity to conceptualize Hindu modernity in seemingly disparate and chronologically unrelated areas – from the *dubash* entrepreneurs of eighteenth-century Madras, to middle-class Hindus in postcolonial Chennai, and their twenty-first-century counterparts in urban centres from Singapore to Britain to North America (Waghorne, 2005).[187]

Awareness of the transnational movement of peoples, commodities, ideas and technologies has helped reinvigorate research into the transition to colonial rule in a place like South Asia. The stated goal of one recent study of the spread of scientific knowledge-making is to suggest that rather than being a 'space for the simple application of European knowledge, nor a vast site for the collection of diverse information to be processed in the metropolis', South Asia is better seen as 'an active, although unequal participant in an emerging world order of knowledge'. In this light, scientific knowledge and practice in Europe and South Asia appear to have been constructed through 'the same circulatory processes' (Raj, 2007, p. 13).[188]

Closely allied with such new directions are those being framed within the rapidly developing field of diaspora studies. To be sure, the study of colonial Hinduism has long recognized that modern Hindu thought and practice (from Rammohan Roy's Hindu Unitarianism, through Swami Vivekananda's Practical Vedānta, right down to contemporary movements like ISKCON) has been shaped by the 'encounter' between India and the West (see Kopf, 1968; Halbfass,

1988). However, the rise of diaspora studies has encouraged scholars to think anew about the dynamic processes of migration, settlement and translation that have fostered the articulation of new Hindu identities not just in South Asia and Europe, but in numerous colonial outposts like East Africa, Guyana, Trinidad and Fiji. As Paul Younger has commented in the conclusion to his study of five communities within the modern Hindu diaspora, it might only be by attending to 'discussions between Hindus from one of the indenture-based societies and Hindus from elsewhere' (for instance, Britain or North America) that one will eventually be able to make sense of how Hinduism has become a 'world religion' (Younger, 2010, p. 245).

A model here might be the work of Tony Ballantyne on modern Sikh identity. Ballantyne emphasizes that we should approach this issue not just in terms of a postcolonial concern with British imperialism, but also with our eyes carefully fixed on one other major component of modernity, namely migration. In his *Orientalism and Race*, Ballantyne urges scholars to get past framing their analyses in terms of the binary structure of metropole and colony. He offers instead a model of history based on the image of a complex web. To the 'vertical' dimension of the London-colony axis, he proposes adding a number of 'horizontal' vectors that served to link diverse and distant colonies one to the other (Ballantyne, 2001).

In a more recent formulation, Ballantyne imagines Sikh identity taking shape 'between colonialism and diaspora' (Ballantyne, 2006). Here he directly challenges the common-sense developmental scheme of 'tradition-colonialism-nation-diaspora' and argues instead for the 'simultaneity' of diaspora and colonialism (2006, p. 83). In other words, the development and contestation of Sikh identity in the Punjab should not be disarticulated from developments taking place in the larger Punjabi Sikh diaspora. I would think that his reflections on the absorption of the local space of the Punjab into 'webs of empire' might prove very helpful for generating new studies of colonial and postcolonial Hinduism, for instance the Swami Narayan or ISKCON movements. Ballantyne writes:

> Under colonialism, Sikhism was reframed not only by struggles over community boundaries between agents of reform, by the weight attached to 'religion' as a distinct social domain, and by the colonial state's enumerative project, but also by its incorporation into the global networks that constituted the British Empire. (Ballantyne, 2006, p. 166)

Could we not approach colonial Hinduism in much the same fashion? One refreshing element of this approach is that it removes the 'nation' from the centre of analysis and thereby works to undermine the often powerful teleologies of history that have been used for the purposes of nationalist legitimation.

Naturally an undertaking such as this critical overview is an exercise in blinkered vision. What I have reviewed here must necessarily be only a sampling; my review has been shaped by my own reading and research interests and will no doubt be disappointing to some.[189] Furthermore, to conduct a review like this is to somewhat grudgingly accept a verdict of obsolescence. Right now there are graduate students gathered in living rooms reading what could well turn out to be the next paradigm-shaping work for the study of colonial Hinduism. If it were mentioned here, it probably would not be the next great thing.

But to acknowledge such limitations is not to gainsay the rewards of conducting such a review. If nothing else, it provides an opportunity to acknowledge the amazing range of developments in Religious Studies, postcolonial theory, diaspora and migration studies, gender studies and history that have taken place over the past several decades. In so doing, we come to appreciate that some trends that were first set in motion in the 'eighties are still yielding rich dividends, while new responses and departures from those earlier initiatives are also beginning to suggest important ways to revisit questions of historical continuity and change, the shaping of locality and region, and the nationalizing of Hindu traditions. It is not possible to say with certainty how research on colonial Hinduism will proceed from here, but it does seem certain that this area of inquiry will remain for some time an important fulcrum for thinking about Hinduism in general. After all, with the right critical levers, the world can be moved!

Notes

1. I use the word Hinduism here as an umbrella term for a mosaic of religious traditions, see Knut A. Jacobsen, 'Introduction', in Knut A. Jacobsen (editor), *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, Vol. I, *Regions, Pilgrimage, Divinities*, Leiden: Brill, 2009, xxxiii–xliii.
2. The *Sāṃkhyasūtra* was composed in the fourteenth or fifteenth century in order to provide Sāṃkhya with a *sūtra* text, but it never attained the status of the *sūtra* texts of the others systems.
3. For a monographic study of Kapila, see Knut A. Jacobsen, *Kapila: Founder of Sāṃkhya and Avatāra of Viṣṇu*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2008.
4. For summaries of the texts and philosophical arguments of this textual tradition see Gerald James Larson and Ram Shankar Bhattacharya (eds), *Yoga: India's Philosophy of Meditation*. Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophy vol. 12. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2008.
5. Larson suggests that assignment of the authorship of *Yogabhāṣya* to Vedavyāsa in Vācaspatimiśra's *Tattvavaiśāradī* might very well be due to a misprint Vedavyāsena for Vindhyavāsena (see Larson and Bhattacharya, *Yoga: India's Philosophy of Meditation*, p. 40).

6. Although the strong Buddhist influence on Yoga has been documented in several publications such as La Vallée Poussin, 'Le Bouddhisme et le Yoga de Patañjali', *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques* 5 (1936–1937): 223–42, and Gerald James Larson and Ram Shankar Bhattacharya (eds), *Yoga: India's Philosophy of Meditation* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2008), it is not generally well-known.
7. For a book-length study of Kāpil Maṭh see my forthcoming monograph *Living Sāṃkhya-Yoga: The Yoga Tradition of Kāpil Maṭh*.
8. Gerald James Larson and Ram Shankar Bhattacharya (eds), *Sāṃkhya: A Dualist Tradition in Indian Philosophy* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987); and Larson and Bhattacharya (eds), *Yoga: India's Philosophy of Meditation*.
9 See Gerald James Larson, 'In Memorian: Dr. Ram Shankar Bhattacharya' (1927–1996), in Larson and Bhattacharya, 2008, pp. 13–18. See also Jacobsen, 2005, pp. 1–3.
10. See Knut A. Jacobsen, 'In Kapila's Cave: A Sāṃkhya-Yoga Renaissance in Bengal', in Knut A. Jacobsen (ed.), *Theory and Practice of Yoga* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 333–50. Guggenbühl (2008) informs that Surama Dasgupta was the first Indian woman to get a Ph.D. (31).
11. See Knut A. Jacobsen, *Living Sāṃkhya-Yoga: The Yoga Tradition of Kāpil Maṭh* for a more comprehensive study of this tradition and also its relationship to modern scholarship.
12. *traividyā māṃ somapāḥ pūtapāpā yajñair iṣṭvā svargatiṃ prārthayante / te puṇyam āsādya surendralokam aśnanti divyān divi devabhogān // te taṃ bhuktvā svargalokaṃ viśālaṃ kṣīṇe puṇye martyalokaṃ viśanti / evaṃ trayīdharmam anuprapannā gatāgataṃ kāmakāmā labhante // Mahābhārata* 6.31:20–1.
13. It is thus clear that the conflict between Rāma and Rāvaṇa is set some time before the Kurukṣetra war. This is also suggested by Vālmīki's having uttered the very first *śloka* (*Rāmāyaṇa* 1.2:14) – a verse form which he then used as the main form for his tale of Rāma, and which Vyāsa also used as the main form for the *Mahābhārata* and *Harivaṃśa*. For the view that Vyāsa's text is later than Vālmīki's, see Goldman, 1984, pp. 33–9. For the view that Vālmīki's text is later than Vyāsa's (and thus would be a kind of prequel), see Hiltebeitel, 2006b, 2009.
14. See Bhatt, Shah et al., 1958–1975 for the *Rāmāyaṇa*; Sukthankar et al., 1933–1966 for the *Mahābhārata*; Vaidya, 1969–1971 for the *Harivaṃśa*. My chapter and verse references are to these editions.
15. Examples are legion; for this perspective elaborated, see Brockington, 1998.
16. See, for example, Hiltebeitel, 2000 for criticism of Brockington; Hiltebeitel, 2001, pp. 316–22 for criticism of Leslie; Hiltebeitel, 2005a for criticism of Vassilkov; Hiltebeitel, 2005b for criticism of Fitzgerald; Hiltebeitel, 2006a for criticism of Oberlies and Grünendahl.
17. Hopkins here (1901, p. 381) is applying the term to 'enormous mass added bodily to the epic as didactic books', and specifically to Bhīṣma's speeches in the *Śāntiparvan* and *Anuśāsanaparvan* ('the narrator in the original version was actually killed before he uttered a word of the appendix').
18. No translation of the critically reconstituted *Mahābhārata*, *Rāmāyaṇa* or *Harivaṃśa* is yet complete, though American translations of the Poona *Mahābhārata* and the Baroda *Rāmāyaṇa* are ongoing: Chicago University Press *Mahābhārata*, van Buitenen, 1973–1978 and Fitzgerald, 2004, four out of ten volumes so far published; Princeton University Press *Rāmāyaṇa*, Goldman et al., 1984–2009, six out of seven volumes so far published. Complete translations exist of unreconstituted versions of all three texts.
19. For a historically informed summary, and discussion sensitive to the existential burden of the king's duty to use violence, see Fitzgerald, 2004, pp. 79–164.
20. For discussion of the exclusion of *śūdras*, see Pollock, 1993, pp. 101–11.

21. Coomaraswamy, 1978, presenting and discussing material from Vedic texts, may seem to give the opposite impression in arguing that the *brahman* is symbolically male to the *kṣatra* which is symbolically female. But we must allow for some slippage between *brahman* and brahmins, and between the king, the *kṣatra*, and *kṣatriyas*; *brahman* may seem to stand above the king, brahmins and *kṣatriyas* below him. Symbolic gender would be relational and variable depending on the partner under consideration at any given time; and with regard to Vedic material we must also take the presumably brahmin audience into account.
22. For Rāma and his brothers, see *Rāmāyaṇa* 1.15; 6.47:104–15; 6.105:12–28; for Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, *Mahābhārata* 1.189:31; *Harivaṃśa* 51:1–6; for Vyāsa, *Mahābhārata* 12.334:9; 12.337; for the Pāṇḍavas, *Mahābhārata* 1.61:84–5; 1.189; for Hanumat, *Rāmāyaṇa* 7.35–6; *Mahābhārata* 3.146–50; for Draupadī, *Mahābhārata* 1.189:33, 47–8; for Sītā, *Rāmāyaṇa* 1.76:17–18 (compare 7.17); for Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa, *Bhagavadgītā* 10–11 (= *Mahābhārata* 6.32–3); for Śiva, *Mahābhārata* 7.57; 13.14–16. More examples could be cited for many of these cases. The relationship between Śiva and Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa is stressed in the *Mahābhārata*, where there may seem to be some authorial awareness of their destinies as great Gods in later Hinduism. Both have *sahasranāmastotras* (hymn-lists of names; see *Mahābhārata* 13.17 for Śiva, 13.135 for Viṣṇu), and their relationship is generally one of complementarity, with Śiva as the more remote and dangerous aspect. See Sutton, 2000, pp. 183–203, also giving some consideration to the sectarian view.
23. For a historical review of scholarly approaches to Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata*, see Hiltebeitel, 1979.
24. On the fraternal dynamics between Daśaratha's sons, see Goldman, 1980.
25. For these – the king's person, the minister, the treasury, the army, the allies, the citizens and the capital – see *Mahābhārata* 12.69:62–3; for the word *prakṛti* in this connection, see *Manusmṛti* 9:294 (in Olivelle, 2005); *Arthaśāstra* 6.1:1 (in Kangle, 1986).
26. 'If we are a metaphor of the universe, the human couple is a metaphor par excellence, the point of intersection of all forces and the seed of all forms' (Paz, 1990, p. 53).
27. For discussion of emic genre terms, see Hiltebeitel, 2005c, pp. 464–79; 2009, pp. 196–210; Tokunaga, 2009.
28. *tebhyo 'yaṃ kuruvaṃśaś ca yadūnāṃ bharatasya ca // yayātīkṣvākuvaṃśaś ca rājarṣīṇāṃ ca sarvaśaḥ / saṃbhūtā bahavo vaṃśā bhūtasargāḥ savistarāḥ // bhūtasthānāni sarvāṇi rahasyaṃ trividhaṃ ca yat / vedayogaṃ savijñānaṃ dharmo 'rthaḥ kāma eva ca // dharmakāmārthaśāstrāṇi śāstrāṇi vividhāni ca / lokayātrāvidhānaṃ ca saṃbhūtaṃ dṛṣṭavān ṛṣiḥ // Mahābhārata* 1.1:44c–47.
29. My thanks to Anna Rawlings for help thinking about these literatures.
30. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the first foreigners to join an ascetic *akhāṛā* did so in the late 1960s.
31. Bhakti did not define a *sampradāya* in the manner of Advaita, Viṣiṣñādvaita, etc.
32. For a condensed discussion of these Orientalist interpretations, see Prentiss, 1999: 3–4, 13–16 (the discussion is presented in much more detail in Pechilis, 1993). Whether these sorts of arguments will again emerge in current popular discussions of Jesus in India remains to be seen. Hawley provides a succinct discussion of the Orientalist assimilation of Christ and Kṛṣṇa (1981, pp. 56–61).
33. Biardeau, 1989: 90. Cited in Prentiss 1999: 18.
34. Miller, 1993: 23.
35. Olivelle, 1996: lii.
36. Miller, 1993: 25–33.
37. Miller, 1993: 22–4, quote from p. 23; Olivellle, 1996: li.
38. Biardeau, 1989: 28, cited in Prentiss, 1999: 18.
39. From the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*: 'When a man's mind is his reins,/intellect, his charioteer;/ He reaches the end of the road,/that highest step of Viṣṇu' (KaU 3.9; Olivelle, 1996:

239); from the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*: 'That form of yours, O Rudra, which is benign and not terrifying, which is not sinister looking – with that most auspicious form of yours, O Mountain-dweller, look upon us' (SU 3.5; Olivelle, 1996: 257).

40. SU 6.23, translated in Olivelle, 1996: 265. A loose scholarly consensus views the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* to be earlier than the *Bhagavad Gītā*. However, Valerie Roebuck discusses Thomas Oberlies' proposal that the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* is later than the *Bhagavad Gītā* based on shared phrases and verses between the two (2003: xxv–xxvi and 448).
41. BG 3.2 and 11.38, translated by J. A. B. van Buitenen (1981): 81, 117 respectively. See also Arjuna's praise of Kṛṣṇa: 'Of the quick and the firm you are the begetter./ By all to be honored the worthiest guru:/ No one is your equal, still less than your better./ For in all three worlds your might has no bounds' (11.43; ibid., 119).
42. Werner, 1993: 51. The entire collection of essays is important for the study of bhakti for, as Werner notes in his introduction: '. . . the editor set out to broaden the scope of the volume still further so that it would explore the greatest possible area of Indian religious tradition, and especially those parts within it in which the existence of *bhakti* has been doubted or even denied' (xv). In addition to articles on bhakti in the Vedas and Buddhism, there are several on bhakti's presence in monistic Hindu traditions. There is a recent book-length publication on bhakti in Theravāda Buddhism, but I have not had a chance to consult it: V. V. S. Saibaba, *Faith and Devotion in Theravāda Buddhism* (New Delhi: D.K. Printworld, Ltd., 2005).
43. Cort, 2002: 60.
44. Cort, 2002: 82–3.
45. Cort, 2002: 75.
46. Contra Cort, 2002: 76.
47. Cort, 2002: 82.
48. Digambara Vaṭṭakera's *Mūlācāra*, cited in Cort, 2002: 76; Śvetāmbara *Āvassaya Nijjutti* (1094–1101) attributed to Bhadrabāhua, cited in Cort, 2002: 77.
49. Digambara Vaṭṭakera's *Mūlācāra*, cited in Cort, 2002: 76; *Tattvārtha Sūtra*, cited in Cort, 2002: 81.
50. Cort, 2002: 78–9.
51. Cort, 2002: 66.
52. Cort, 2002: 64, on 'second class Jains'.
53. Kelting (2001): 134. See her discussion of the nature of *stavan*s, including a comparison with Hindu devotional hymns pp. 87–93.
54. Kelting (2001): 135. Her discussion continues by discussing the fact that 'in this stavan it seems clear that the singer is asking the Jina to be affected'.
55. Kelting (2001): 193–203.
56. Tartakov and Dehejia, 1984.
57. Prentiss, 1999: 69–76.
58. For example, Cort's image of a 'continuum' of bhakti: 'If we view bhakti as lying along a continuum from sober veneration to frenzied possession, as I argued at the outset of this article, then the Jains and Buddhists (as well as those Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava cults that focused on elaborate bhakti rituals encoded in Sanskrit *Āgama*s) lay at one end and the Nāyaṉārs and Āḻvārs (as well as cults based on possession by deities such as Muruga*n* and the goddess) lay at the other end,' is at best irresponsibly inaccurate and at worst polemical (2002: 85).
59. For a debate on this point in early Indian traditions, see Olivelle, 1995.
60. Cutler (1987) specifically deals with the early Tamil bhakti saints. These saints occasionally use the term patti (Tamil for Sanskrit *bhakti*), but they also use other expressions, such as `the heart melting'.

61. Sharma, 1988: 125–6.
62. This is an understatement. When I gave a paper on Sharma's take on definitions of bhakti at the Conference on Religion in South India held in Indiana in the early 1990s, it was received by blank stares from the senior male scholars of bhakti around the conference table. After my presentation, one of them told me that 'no one reads Sharma'. Ann Grodzins Gold's (2000) reflections on dismissive responses have helped me to locate this experience.
63. Prentiss, 1999: 13–24.
64. Hawley, 2007. Note that Novetszke has recently noted: 'No studies, to my knowledge, defend explicitly the idea that a unified social movement existed in Indian history under the sign of *bhakti*, though many deploy the term "*bhakti* movement" as shorthand for the heterogenous cultural and literary products that have been formed around the term' (2008: 22).
65. Sharma, 1988: 297–8.
66. Prentiss (1999: 35) highlights the glorification of the text as a major theme in locating the polemic. Concerning authorship of the text, there is a disagreement between Sharma, who sees Vallabhācārya and Chaitanya as major influences (1988: 307–10), while Hawley 'can see good cause for presuming a knowledge of Rāmānuja and Mādhva and their *sampradāya*s on the part of the author or the text, but not of Nimbārka, Viṣṇusvāmī, or Vallabhācārya' (2007: 224 n. 6). Hardy (1983) discusses the development of bhakti in Tamil South India from early poetry to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.
67. Hawley, 2007: 220–1. Hawley's article is the introduction to a special issue of the *International Journal of Hindu Studies* on bhakti as a movement, and I cite the other articles separately.
68. Matchett, 2005 makes this case strongly.
69. E.g., Lele, 1981; Schomer and McLeod, 1987; Vaudevīlle, 1993; Werner, 1993; Eck and Mallison, 1991; Lorenzen, 1995; Hawley, 2005; Zelliot and Mokashi-Punekar, 2005; Bryant, 2007.
70. Tamil: Rāmānujan, 1981; Cutler, 1987; Carman and Narayanan, 1989; Peterson, 1989; Dehejia, 1990; Prentiss, 1999; Hopkins, 2002. Kannada: Rāmānujan, 1973. Telugu: Narayana Rao and Shulman, 2002, 2005. Bengali: McDermott, 2001a, 2001b. Marathi: Chitre, 1991; Mokashi-Punkar, 2002. Hindi: Hawley and Juergensmeyer, 1988; Dass, 1991; Callewaert and Friedlander, 1992; Hess and Shukdev Singh, 2002; Dharwadker, 2003. Tharu and Lalita (1991) provide a collection of female saints' works in translation.
71. On Tamil, *maṇipravāḷam* and the emergence of Malayalam in Kerala, see Freeman, 1998.
72. Miller, 1977 provides a translation and discussion of the *Gītagovinda*; Haberman 2003 provides an annotated translation of the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu*; Schweig, 2005 translates the *Rāsa Līlā*.
73. McGlashan, 2006; Rao, 1990.
74. Cited in Dehejia, 1990: 7.
75. Novetzke, 2008: 36.
76. Zelliot, 1981; Jaffrelot, 2005.
77. Sharma, 1988: 196.
78. Hawley and Jurgensmeyer, 1988: 134.
79. Personal communication, 8 December 2009.
80. Novetzke, 2008: 72.
81. Novetzke, 2008: 39.
82. Shukla-Bhatt, 2007a: 277.

83. Drama: Hawley, 1981, Haberman, 2001 [1988], Lutgendorf, 1991, Pechilis, 2009. Poetics: Cutler, 1988, Hopkins, 2002, Kelting, 2001. Literary aesthetics: Monius 2004. Performance of song: Kelting, 2001, Pechilis, 2006, Narayanan, 2007, Shukla-Bhatt, 2007a. Performance of dance: Pati 2010. Ritual: Venkatesan 2010.
84. Detailed studies of interactions among Ṣūfism and bhakti, documented or possible, such as Behl's are needed. Useful but less provocative are studies that present the two as parallel developments (e.g. Iraqi, 2009).
85. We should explain at once that, in this short article, we will be saying nothing about tantrism (or 'Tantra') in the colonial and post-colonial period, and within the pre-colonial period our emphasis lies mainly on the period covering the origins of tantrism to 1300 or so, that period being of the greatest interest to us. Because of the vast increase in the quantity of scholarship in this field in the last thirty-five years or so, we have been forced to be even more selective. Our coverage is fullest for the decade and a half from 1995, though we have tried to mention some of the most important publications of the two decades preceding that period. We are grateful to Professor Shaman Hatley for reading an earlier draft of this article and making many useful suggestions.
86. For a brief account, see the booklet prepared by Muller and Goodall (2005).
87. For Hélène Brunner's scholarly biography see Padoux (2007). Sanderson (2007b) has himself written about his early studies, and about his teacher Swami Lakshman Joo. The latter was himself a figure who, though a guru rather than an academic, profoundly influenced the course of Tantric Studies in the West through the teachings he gave to many scholars, including Lilian Silburn and Raniero Gnoli, who visited him in Kashmir.
88. For a very detailed treatment of other factors involved in the success of the Mantramārga, see Sanderson 2009, especially pp. 252–303.
89. The earlier Buddhist tantric sources that are classed as Kriyātantras, such as the *Mañjuśriyamūlakalpa*, display rather little interest in soteriology.
90. In the *Niśvāsa*, the mantra involved is Vāmadeva, for the recipe is found in the *Vāmadevakalpa*, the manual of rites to be performed with that mantra.
91. Compare *Niśvāsa Guhyasūtra* 14.65: *atha lavaṇamayīṃ pratikṛtiṃ kṛtvā rudhireṇābhyajya tīkṣṇaśastreṇotkṛtya pādau prabhṛti chitvāṣṭasahasraṃ juhuyā striyā puruṣasya vā sa vaśyo bhavati*. with *Mañjuśriyamūlakalpa* chapter 55 (G p. 673): *lavaṇamayīṃ pratikṛtiṃ chittvā chittvā juhuyād aṣṭasahasram. yam icchati sa vaśo bhavati strī vā puruṣo vā.*
92. *aṣṭasahasrahomena trividhā siddhir bhavati (10:31). uṣme pādapracārikāṃ, dhūmāyamāne 'ntardhānam, jvalitenākāśagamanam* (10:32).
93. See Goodall and Isaacson 2007:5.
94. The earliest attestation of the label appears to be in the eighth-century inscription round the base of the principal shrine in the Kailāsanātha temple in Kancheepuram, the pertinent verse of which is discussed by Goodall 2004:xix, fn.17.
95. That the *Svāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgraha* must be seventh century or earlier can be determined because Sadyojyotiḥ, whom Sanderson judges to have been active between approximately 675 and 725 (2006:76), has written a commentary on its opening chapters.
96. A recent doctoral thesis by Nina Mirnig (2009*) has been devoted to this theme.
97. A single half-line, however, appears to allude to an inversion of a ritual sequence in the context of *antyeṣṭi*: *Guhyasūtra* 11.38ab.
98. See Goodall, forthcoming.
99. For further evidence and discussion, see Goodall 1998:xxxvi ff. and 2004:xiii ff.

100. Numerous publications have appeared in recent years that focus on this (in our view) twelfth- and post-twelfth-century literature: Brunner's posthumously published French translation of the *Parārthanityāpūjāpaddhati* (1999); the French translation of the *Rauravāgama* (of which only the *Rauravasūtrasaṅgraha* is ancient, according to Goodall 2004:xliv–xlvi) by Dagens and Barazer-Billoret (2000); the re-edition and complete English translation of the *Ajita* by Bhatt, Filliozat and Filliozat (2005); the first edition of the *Dīpta* by Barazer-Billoret et al. (2004, 2007, 2009); a translation and study of the *Mahotsavavidhi* attributed to Aghoraśiva (Davis 2010); and the first volume of an edition of the *Sūkṣma* (Sambandhaśivācārya and Ganesan 2010).
101. A developing tool that demonstrates this is the *Tāntrikābhidhānakośa*, the dictionary of 'Hindu' tantric terminology being prepared by a team assembled by the Austrian Academy of Sciences, currently under Marion Rastelli and Dominic Goodall. Entry after entry concerning temple rituals and festivals suggests that these post-twelfth-century Śaiva and Pāñcarātra scriptures belonged to the same thought-world.
102. The iconographical section of the last mentioned of these, also known as the *Niśvāsākhyamahātantra*, has recently been the focus of work by Anna Ślączka, as announced in the 14th World Sanskrit Conference in Kyoto in 2009, and an Oxford doctoral thesis by Elizabeth Mills on the *prāsādalakṣaṇa* sections of these and other early Śaiva works is far advanced.
103. We would recommend that it be read together with the exceptionally long and rich review by Brunner (1988). A fresh edition and translation would be welcome.
104. A dozen years before his edition of the *Vīṇāśikhatantra*, and indeed before he was aware that that tantra was extant in Sanskrit, Goudriaan (1973) had already given a useful survey, ranging over South-East Asian as well as South Asian material, of what could then be known about the cult of Tumburu and the sisters.
105. In his review article on the edition by Goudriaan and Schoterman of the *Kubjikāmatatantra*, Sanderson has suggested that among the goddess-oriented traditions, the *Tantrasadbhāvatantra* is one of the most fundamental scriptures, and should be given priority in study over later works, such as those of the Paścimāmnāya to which the *Kubjikāmatatantra* belongs (Sanderson 2002, p. 20).
106. Of course for several other works of which editions were published in the KSTS, including the large and rich commentaries by Abhinavagupta's pupil Kṣemarāja, there is in our opinion the same need to approach the text afresh on the basis of the extant manuscripts. One may add that the manuscripts in the important Srinagar collection, which had been inaccessible to scholars for decades, have recently been digitized by the National Mission for Manuscripts at the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts. The efforts of Mrinal Kaul to make the treasures of this collection available to scholars should also be mentioned here.
107. We may remark here in passing that Hatley's work also contains, in its second and third chapters (Hatley 2007*, pp. 31–189) a valuable study of the yoginī cult in early tantric literature. This covers much of the same ground as a monograph by White (2003), but does so in a considerably sounder fashion.
108. See Sanderson 2001, pp. 42ff.; Hatley 2007*, pp. 176ff. There may still be a possibility that the Śaiva source drawn on by the Buddhists was not the *Brahmayāmala* itself, but some now lost tantra which has been cannibalized in the *Brahmayāmala.* But the *Brahmayāmala*, whose own textual history no doubt is very complex (cf. Hatley 2007*, pp. 200–11), is no less important for the fact that some of the material it contains may have been taken over from yet earlier scriptures.
109. For Abhinavagupta's citations of and references to the *Brahmayāmala* see Hatley 2007*, pp. 211–13 (especially n. 57) and p. 237 nn. 1 and 2.
110. See Sanderson 2007a, p. 280. On other Pāñcarātra scriptural sources of Vāmanadatta see Sferra 1998.

111. Sanderson (2007a, p. 280) points out, however, that this appears to be the title only of the first section of the hymn, which he prefers to call *Viṣṇustuti, with the asterisk indicating that this title is not attested in the manuscripts or in references to the work by Sanskrit authors.
112. In the same passage (1996:24) Strickmann avers 'Je suis convaincu que les āgama du Śivaïsme et les tantra du bouddhisme médiéval représentent simplement différentes versions, différentes rédactions d'une seule et même chose.'
113. 'The ritual systems taught in the Śaiva and Pāñcarātrika Samhitās resemble each other so closely in morphology and syntax that they have the appearance of two dialects of a single "Tantric" language' (Sanderson 2001:38, n. 50).
114. The project, jointly financed by the French and German national funding agencies (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft and Agence Nationale pour la Recherche), runs from 2008 to 2010. Annotated editions (or partial editions) of several of the texts referred to above are the primary fruits of this project, and a volume of studies by several participants is shortly to appear as a special issue of the journal Tantric Studies.
115. In some instances, whole chapters, such as 59, of the South Indian edition of the *Kiraṇatantra*, for example, which is based on only a handful of Southern manuscripts, are unintelligible.
116. As is often stated or implied; cf. for instance Larson (2009), for whom 'serious philological research is the beginning of most important research in South Asian studies', but should, he suggests, be relegated to appendices.
117. I am grateful to Sthaneshwar Timalsina for his helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.
118. Following on Placide Tempel's studies of the Bantus, a predominant academic approach has endeavoured to identify the 'ethno-philosophy', understood as the communal and unreflexive worldview, of African tribal cultures. Such characterizations, however, may be understood as largely generated in a circular manner by the very ethnographic methods employed, of searching for items of consent within groups. In opposition to such approaches, the Kenyan scholar, Henry Odera Oruka, *Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990), has argued for the presence of 'philosophical sagacity' in non-literate tribal cultures, practiced by individuals who freely and critically question their inherited beliefs and practices, and speculatively arrive at their own.
119. Cf. the yet narrower definition of philosophy as a search for foundations in David Peter Lawrence, *Rediscovering God with Transcendental Argument: A Contemporary Interpretation of Monistic Kashmiri Śaiva Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), pp. 11–12. In the present context, a programmatic definition is offered that would encompass both foundationalist and anti-foundationalist philosophies.
120. Of course, there is no pure cosmopolitanism, and there are always limits to the acceptance of diversity and the intellectual challenges it poses.
121. Wilhelm Halbfass, 'Philosophy in Modern Hinduism', in *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), pp. 287–309, problematizes the contemporary application of the Western term philosophy to categorize Hindu discourses. In the author's view, a great number of Sanskrit academic discourses do satisfy the definition of philosophy given, though certainly systematic expositions of doctrines and practices vary greatly in the role they accord to rational argument (*anumāna, tarka* and so on) in relation to other epistemic and axiological authorities. Even advocates of the ultimate authority of the Veda, such as followers Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta, have had to repeatedly defend their

position with arguments, and the tradition thus became increasingly sophisticated philosophically.

122. This causal view is a basic expression of modern 'instrumental rationality'. See Martin Heidegger, 'The Question Concerning Technology', William Lovitt (trans.), in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings,* ed. with an introduction by David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977), pp. 283–317. For such thinking, the world is viewed as intellectually controllable and technically exploitable 'standing reserve'. On the modern and postmodern problematization of philosophy, also see Lawrence, *Rediscovering God,* pp. 1–16.
123. When agency is admitted, it is usually defined by objective contexts of action.
124. Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge,* Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (trans.) (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989) explains this in terms of the reflexive application of the modern incredulity towards traditional narratives, to the modern metanarrative of the progress of human reason.
125. Lawrence, *Rediscovering God,* pp. 1–16 endeavours to synthesize arguments that strong relativism/constructionism is incoherent. We cannot avoid the assumption that something is unconstructed.
126. Halbfass, *India and Europe,* p. 157. Also see the analysis in Garfield, as well as King, 1999a; King, 1999b; Cf. Jeffrey Kripal (2002), 'Debating the Mystical as the Ethical: An Indological Map' in Kripal et al., 2002, pp. 15–69, on the related Orientalist arguments that there is a lack of ethics in Hindu and other Eastern 'monistic' mysticism.
127. Jessica Frazier, *Reality, Religion, and Passion: Indian and Western Approaches in Hans-Georg Gadamer and Rūpa Gosvāmi* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009), p. 14, describes the historicist bias against comparative engagement as 'a postcolonial xenophobia endemic to the idea of academic research as an accumulation of *knowledge* within set boundaries, like capital stored safely in a vault' Cf. the revision of Quentin Skinner's historicism in Jonardon Ganeri, 'Contextualism in the Study of Indian Intellectual Cultures', *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 36 (2008): 551–62. The historical context of Indian philosophies may be identified in ongoing discussions of intellectual issues rather than only immediate social circumstances.
128. Sheldon Pollock, 'The Theory of Practice and the Practice of Theory in Indian Intellectual History', in *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 105 (1985): p. 516. It may be acknowledged that there is a conservative aspect to Śāstra*ic* thought; this is evinced particularly in its organization into schools concerned with expositing the enduring significance in originary texts (*sūtras*) through written and oral commentaries. Pollock's idea is that the conservative aspect of such culture obstructs the recognition of concrete historical processes and the development of efforts to remedy inequities. Though his basic position remains the same, Pollock has more recently acknowledged limited innovativeness in Sanskritic philosophies immediately preceding modernization. Sheldon Pollock, 'New Intellectuals in Seventeenth-Century India, *Indian Economic and Social History Review* No. 38.1 (2001): pp. 3–31. Others have also challenged the conception of Indian thought as static. Thus Lawrence McCrea, 'Playing with the System: Fragmentation and Individualization in Late Pre-Colonial Mīmāṃsā', *Journal of Indian Philosophy,* No. 36 (2008): pp. 575–85, has argued that sixteenth to seventeenth-century Mīmāṃsā hermeneutics involved so much change that it challenges ideas of the philosophical systems as static. Sanskritic philosophies, perhaps in some ways like Confucianism, anticipate contemporary hermeneutics in recognizing the unavoidable role of tradition in addressing ongoing concerns. This understanding may or may not be linked with the justification of power. See the discussion below on engagements between contemporary Western and Hindu hermeneutics.

129. White, 2003, p.Xiii. White's interpretations of monistic Śaiva philosophy build upon those of Alexis Sanderson, which conceive it as part of a broader pattern of 'domesticization', within which Tantric traditions tried to appeal to mainstream brahminical culture (Sanderson in Carrithers et al., 1985, pp. 190–216).
130. Though Apel conceives it as transcendental, his discourse ethics has strong affinities with Habermas' theory of the 'ideal speech situation'. Also see, Karl Otto Apel, 'The Problem of Philosophical Foundations in Light of a Transcendental Pragmatics of Language' in Kenneth Baynes, James Bohman and Thomas McCarthy (eds), *After Philosophy: End or Transformation?,* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), p. 280; idem, *The Response of Discourse Ethics: To the Moral Challenge of the Human Situation as Such and Especially Today,* Leuven: Peeters, 2001.
131. For example, many sceptical philosophers will not agree that we need to assume that we are pursuing knowledge of any truth about reality.
132. These issues are discussed in David Peter Lawrence, 'Truth and Power in Sanskrit Philosophical Discourse' (working paper). For a brief overview of Sanskrit philosophical methodologies, and the preeminent influence of the Nyāya school therein, see Bimal Kṛṣṇa Matilal, 'The Nature of Philosophical Argument' chap. in *Perception: An Essay on Classical Indian Theories of Knowledge* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), pp. 69–93. For a detailed historical account, see Esther A. Solomon, *Indian Dialectics: Methods of Philosophical Discussion,* 2 vols (Ahmedabad: B.J. Institute of Learning and Research, 1976–1978). While the Naiyayikas allow some role to *jalpa* in special situations, they recognize that philosophical discourse is founded upon *vāda.* The Naiyayikas also denigrate critique without the establishment of one's own position (*vitaṇḍā*). That method is a specialty of the Mādhyamika Buddhists and the Advaita Vedānta of Śrīharṣa. Although controversial, such critique does follow an ideal of intellectual honesty, eschewing the pursuit of victory through mere rhetoric.
133. See the landmark study of J. W. McCrindle, *Ancient India as Described in Classical Literature* (Westminister: Archibald Constable, 1991). For a brief overview of Western images of India beginning with the Hellenistic literature, see Milton Singer, 'Passage to More than India: A Sketch of Changing European and American Images', in *When a Great Tradition Modernizes: An Anthropological Approach to Indian Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 11–38.
134. On modern romantic idealizations of Hindu mysticism, see Halbfass, 'India and the Romantic Critique of the Present', in *India and Europe,* pp. 69–83; John Drew, *India and the Romantic Imagination* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987); Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion.*
135. Hugh B. Urban, *Tantra: Sex, Secrecy, Politics, and Power in the Study of Religion,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), demonstrates this clearly through examining the dialectic between modern Western and Indian representations of Tantra.
136. Mohanty recognizes the legitimacy of the 'wisdom seeker's agenda' when not misguided about sophisticated Indian intellectual traditions, in 'What the East and West can Learn from Each Other' in *Explorations in Philosophy, Volume 1: Indian Philosophy,* Bina Gupta (ed.) (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 88–9.
137. Cf. the argument that comparative philosophy should turn away from the 'thematic comparison' typifying much of comparative religion, in favour of 'meta-questions of truth and its relation to logic and ethics' in Frazier, *Reality, Religion, and Passion,* p. 12. Mohanty goes so far as saying regarding the determination of sameness that 'that discovery is interesting, bolstering faith in the universality of reason, but is not *philosophically* exciting'. 'What the East and West can Learn from Each Other in Philosophy', in *Explorations in Philosophy,* pp. 85–6.
138. Jitendra Nāth Mohanty, ''Indian Thought: Between Tradition and Modernity' in *Explorations in Philosophy,* pp. 59–60. Mohanty is rather unfair in asserting that there

is little philosophical creativity in either group. Ibid., p. 60. The historical development of this situation is documented in Halbfass, *India and Europe.*

139. See the record of a debate about Western understandings of propositions, in which the participants spoke both Sanskrit and English, in Daya Krishna et al. (eds), *Samvāda: A Dialogue between Two Philosophical Traditions* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991); and the engagement with Western epistemology in Arindam Chakrabarti, *Adhunikapratīcyaprāmāṇamīmāṃsā* (Tirupati: Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyāpith, 2005).
140. See the criticisms of a more narrowly comparative conception of comparative philosophy in Mohanty, 'Indian Thought: Between Tradition and Modernity', in *Explorations in Philosophy,* p. 60, and 'What the East and West can Learn from Each Other in Philosophy', in *Explorations in Philosophy,* pp. 85–90.
141. Lawrence, *Rediscovering God,* pp. 12–13.
142. This is evinced in the name of the Polylog Forum for Intercultural Philosophy, at *http://www.polylog.org/index-en.htm* <accessed 22 July 2010 >
143. For examples of the works of Matilal's contemporaries and successors carrying on many similar interests and approaches, see Purushottama Bilimoria, *Śabdaprāmaṇa: Word and Knowledge* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1988); Arindam Chakrabarti, *Denying Existence: The Logic, Epistemology and Pragmatics of Negative Existentials and Fictional Discourse* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997); Kisor Kumar Chakrabarti, *Classical Indian Philosophy of Induction* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010); Jonardon Ganeri, *Philosophy in Classical India: The Proper Work of Reason* (London: Routledge, 2001); Stephen H. Phillips, *Classical Indian Metaphysics: Refutations of Realism and the Emergence of the 'New Logic'* (Chicago: Open Court, 1995); and Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad, *Advaita Epistemology and Metaphysics: An Outline of Indian Non-Realism* (London: Routledge, 2002). On the origin of analytic philosophy, see J. O. Urmson, *Philosophical Analysis: Its Development between the Two World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).
144. While surveying the positions of many schools, Matilal defends a revisionist version of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika direct realism.
145. Another influential scholar, Daya Krishna is notorious for his minimization or outright denial of the religious aspects of Indian philosophy. See Daya Krishna, *Indian Philosophy: A Counter Perspective* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996).
146. While acknowledging that all theories are intertwined with practical interests, Mohanty contends that Indian philosophy is nevertheless 'purely theoretical'. See Jitendra Nāth Mohanty, 'Theory and Practice in Indian Philosophy', in *Explorations in Philosophy,* No. 24. Ganeri, 'The Motive and Method of Rational Inquiry', in *Philosophy in Classical India*, pp. 7–41, as we understand him, argues that in Indian philosophy there is both instrumental rationality and rationality about goals, which we would call substantive rationality. This debate is carried over into discussions of the nature of inferential necessity in Indian philosophy, and particularly whether there is in it any form of 'transcendental argument'. Scholars such as J. N. Mohanty, *Reason and Tradition in Indian Thought: An Essay on the Nature of Indian Philosophical Thinking* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); Lawrence, *Rediscovering God;* and Ram-Prasad, *Advaita Epistemology and Metaphysics,* have described some South Asian philosophical arguments as 'transcendental', in an expansion of the Kantian sense of the term. Recently, Dan Arnold, 'Transcendental Arguments and Practical Reason in Indian Philosophy', *Argumentation* No. 22 (2008): pp. 135–47, has suggested that Sanskritic varieties of transcendental argumentation do not chiefly pertain to strict deductions of theoretical reason, but rather the performative coherence of practical reason. Cf. the argument for the character of the discourse of the Pratyabhijñā system of monistic Kashmiri Śaiva philosophy as simultaneously a publicly assessable 'inference for the sake of others' (*parārthānumāna*) and a gnoseologically internal-

ized Tantric ritual that recapitulates the myth of Śiva-Śakti, in David Peter Lawrence, 'Tantric Argument: The Transfiguration of Philosophical Discourse in the Pratyabhijñā System of Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta', *Philosophy East and West,* No. 46 (1996): pp. 165–204.

147. See the writings of Antonio Cua, Roger Ames and Chad Hansen.
148. The British colonialists early on promoted cross-cultural dialogue with the purpose of demonstrating the superiority of Western culture. See the interesting discussion of the motivations for the sponsoring of Sanskrit scholarship and the creation of Banaras Sanskrit College, in Michael S. Dodson, *Orientalism, Empire, and National Culture: India, 1770–1880* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). Cf. James Baldwin, 'Everybody's Protest Novel', in *Notes from a Native Son* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), pp. 13–23, on how protest itself can reinforce categories of subordination.
149. Efforts were made in the early twentieth century to promote dialogue between Indian and Chinese cultures by Rabindranath Tagore and Tan Yun-Shen. More recently, scholars such as Ram-Prasad have endeavoured to promote philosophical engagements between Chinese and Western thought. See Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad, *Eastern Philosophy* (London: Weidenfield & Nicholson, 2005). Ram-Prasad is also one of the founders of the Seminar on Religions in Chinese and Indian Cultures at the American Academy of Religions Annual Conference. Cf. the more political project of Gayatri Spivak, *Other Asias,* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008).
150. Gayatri Spivak, personal communication. Some of his work on this subject is collected in Bimal Kṛṣṇa Matilal, *Ethics and Epics: Philosophy, Culture, and Religion,* Jonardon Ganeri (ed.) (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002).
151. Mohanty argues that 'Today, Indian philosophy needs to be a *critique of dharma,* without which the practicality that is claimed on its behalf by modern exponents would be nothing but pretence. Such a critique would be epistemological, hermeneutic, moral and political. . . . ' Mohanty, 'Theory and Practice in Indian Philosophy', in *Explorations in Philosophy,* No. 30. For such projects, see Purushottama Bilimoria, Joseph Prabhu and Renuka Sharma (eds), *Indian Ethics: Classical Traditions and Contemporary Challenges,* Vol. 1 (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007); T. S. Rukmani, *The Mahābhārata: What is not here is nowhere else (Yannehāsti na Tadkvacit)* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2005); T. S. Rukmani, 'Value Ethics in the Early Upaniṣads: A Hermeneutic Study', in Rita Sherma and Arvind Sharma (eds), *Hermeneutics and Hindu Thought: Toward a Fusion of Horizons* (New York: Springer, 2008), pp. 151–68; Nicholas F. Gier, *The Virtue of Nonviolence from Gautama to Gandhi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004); On environmental ethics, see Christopher Key Chapple and Mary Evelyn Tucker (eds), *Hinduism and Ecology: The Intersection of Earth, Sky, and Water* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).
152. For example, in psychoanalysis, see Sudhir Kakar, *The Inner World: A Psycho-Analytic Study of Childhood and Society in India,* 2nd ed. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982); Jeffrey J. Kripal, *Kālī's Child: The Mystical and the Erotic in the Life and Teachings of Ramakrishna,* 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). In semiotic anthropology, see E. Valentine Daniel, *Fluid Signs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Milton Singer, *Man's Glassy Essence: Explorations in Semiotic Anthropology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984); and in medical anthropology and geriatrics, see Lawrence Cohen, *No Aging in India: Alzheimer's, the Bad Family, and Other Modern Things* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).
153. On the application of Sanskritic poetics to the contemporary study of Tantra, see Sthaneshwar Timalsina, 'Metaphor, Rasa, and Dhvani: Suggested Meaning in Tantric Esotericism', *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion,* No. 19 (2007): pp. 134–62. Sthaneshwar Timalsina, *Language of Images: Visualization and Meaning in Tantra* (in

progress), examines the indigenous hermeneutics of images. For suggestions on the beginnings of an engagement between Indian philosophy of language and contemporary semiotics, which could eventually be extended to semiotic studies of India, see Edwin Gerow, 'Language and Symbol in Indian Semiotics', *Philosophy East and West,* No. 34 (1984): pp. 245–60; and David Peter Lawrence, 'Abhinavagupta's Philosophical Hermeneutics of Grammatical Persons', *Journal of Hindu Studies* No. 1 (2008): pp. 11–25. For the application of Sanskrit theories of action syntax (*kriya-karaka* relations) to comparative linguistic accounts of action (Burkean grammars of motives), see David Peter Lawrence, 'The Mythico-Ritual Syntax of Oṃnipotence', *Philosophy East and West, No.* 48 (1998): pp. 592–622; and for the application of these theories to the practice of the contemporary scholar of Indian philosophy, see Parimal Patil, 'A Grammar for Comparison', in *Against a Hindu God,* pp. 8–21. For suggestions about a philosophical dialogue between psychoanalytic theories of narcissism and monistic Kashmiri Śaiva philosophical psychology, see David Peter Lawrence, 'Comparative Reflections: Cosmic Narcissism and Divine Self-Satisfaction', in *The Teachings of the Odd-Eyed One: A Study and Translation of the Virūpākṣapañcāśikā with the Commentary of Vidyācakravartin,* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008, pp.39–56).

154. Jeffrey R. Timm, (ed.), *Texts in Context: Traditional Hermeneutics in South Asia* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992); Laurie L. Patton, (ed.), *Authority, Anxiety, and Canon: Essays in Vedic Interpretation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994); the inaugural issue of the *Journal of Hindu Studies,* No. 1 (2008), focusing on hermeneutics in Hinduism and Hindu studies; Rita Sherma and Arvind Sharma (eds), *Hermeneutics and Hindu Thought;* Frazier, *Reality, Religion, and Passion;* Sebastian Alackapally, *Being and Meaning: Reality and Language in Bhartrhari and Heidegger* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2002). On doxography and dialogistics, see Frederick M. Smith, 'The Hierarchy of Philosophical Systems according to Vallabhācārya', in *Journal of Indian Philosophy,* No. 33 (2005): pp. 421–53; David Peter Lawrence, 'Zu Abhinavaguptas Offenbarungstheorie', *Polylog,* No. 5 (2000): pp. 6–18; and Harold Coward, *Modern Indian Responses to Religious Pluralism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988). Laurie Patton and Brian Black have recently initiated the ongoing Sammukham Workshop at the annual meetings of the American Academy of Religion.
155. See Laurie L. Patton, *Myth as Philosophy: The Brhaddevatā as Canonical Commentary* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1996). Cf. the remarks above on Oruka's theory of philosophical sagacity.
156. See Mohanty's discussion of the value of learning alternative ways of thinking in 'What the East and West can Learn from Each Other in Philosophy', in *Explorations in Philosophy,* pp. 85–90, and his refutation of Husserl's project of the 'Europeanization of the Earth', in 'Between Indology and Indian Philosophy', in *Explorations in Philosophy,* pp. 80–2.
157. The definition of 'Hindu' in the dictionary of the Royal Nepal Academy (B. K. Pokharel, 1983: 1419), reads: 'The people or the religion who comply (*mānnu*) with the Vedas, the Dharmaśāstras, the Nītiśāstras and the Purāṇas'. This 'official' definition is interesting given that the literacy rate in Nepal was only 24 per cent in the 1981 census, while every citizen was de facto considered Hindu by simply living in a Hindu kingdom as long as they did not clearly claim another religion. Thus, belonging to Hinduism, though based on a core of Hindu texts and written standards, was clearly not understood in terms of direct access to the latter by reading original Sanskrit texts nor even modern language translations.

For the Supreme Court of India, referring to the Vedas also defines Hinduism as shown by a case involving the Swaminarayana Sampradāya in the 1960s, which was settled by the Supreme Court, which first ascertained that Hinduism 'may broadly be described as a way of life and nothing more', but then defined it as: 'the accept-

ance of the Vedas with reverence, recognition of the fact that the means or ways of salvation are diverse; realization of the truth that the number of gods to be worshipped is large'. See the analysis of the case by Galanter (1971).

158. Parallel to these questionings about the origin, definition and limits of Hinduism, a considerable number of publications from India deals with the question of what should be regarded as 'authentic' or 'real' Hinduism.
159. In his essay on castes, first published in French in 1938, A. M. Hocart develops the theory that the caste system is a ritual organization, with the king placed at its head.
160. Thus, the 1892 edition of the Littré dictionary gives the following definition of 'hindouisme': 'Set of the social and religious institutions of India; Brahmanical social system'.
161. For a noteworthy presentation and analysis of the Subaltern Studies, see J. Pouchepadass (2000).
162. In its ancient usage, the term 'caste' often applied both to the *varṇa* and to the *jāt* or *jāti*, causing some confusion. But this confusion is far from being absent among the Hindus. Thus the Nepalese often refer to four main *jāt* and to a multitude of *varṇa*, instead of the contrary.
163. For a discussion on the dates 1829 and 1816 (when the term was used by an Indian scholar), see D. N. Lorenzen (2006, pp. 3–4). In fact, the term Hinduism appears ealier, in 1800, on p. 52 of the *Asiatic Journal Register*, as well as on p. 188 of Kirckpatrick's *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepaul*, published in 1811. The latter visited Nepal in 1793 and wrote in his Preface that he waited ten years after the composition of his text before submitting it to publication, which enables it to be dated to the very end of the eighteenth century. The German term Hinduismus is contemporary, appearing in 1817 (*Magazin für die neueste gesichte der protestantischen Missions und Bibelgeseuschaften*, Vol. 2, p. 280).
164. D. N. Lorenzen (2006, p. 32) traces the first inscription in which a king explicitly presents himself as 'Hindu' to mid-fourteenth-century Andhra Pradesh. We shall add for information purposes that a king from today's Western Nepal claimed this identity a few decades later, in an inscription dated 1404 (M. R. Pant, 2009, p. 303).
165. See Lecomte-Tilouine (2009, p. 21) on this point and on the various constructions of alterity in the Hindu world.
166. I have borrowed the term from M. S. S. Pandian, 2002.
167. Opposed to this statement, one may quote, among many other facts, the divison into four classes of the Indian central administration, whose composition in terms of caste is so hierarchical that C. Jaffrelot (2002, p. 135) suggests comparing it to the caste system.
168. See Dipankar Gupta, 2004: pp. vii and ix, for whom 'each caste values itself very highly'. While it is unclear whether his position regarding the end of the caste-related hierarchy is wishful thinking or a form of negationism, on the other hand, we agree with his idea that the affirmation of difference is becoming a prominent social phenomenon.
169. That is the 'Hill upper-castes', who form one-third of Nepal's total population.
170. This underlying idea is openly formulated by Serge Bouez (1992, p. 5): 'As skilled strategists of the thought, the Brahmins took care not to let the popular voice constitutes itself as a system'.
171. This type of service is merged with the sacred contract between a Brahmin priest and a householder in the jajmani system. However, a clear distinction is made between the two relationships in places such as Nepal, and the term jajman is used for the second case only.

172. On the other hand, a professionalization of the priestly function remains rare, though it exists in Tamil Nadu, see M. R. Venkatesh: 'Enter, the Dalit priest', *The Telegraph*, Calcutta, 26 April 2008.
173. See the contributions in Ishii, Gellner, Nawa (2007).
174. As J.-C. Galey (1986, p. 971) formulates it: 'the Indian world not only acknowledges the multiplicity of elements of which it is composed but also makes of heterogeneity and discontinuity the very matter of its constitutive relations'.
175. Neither 'colonial' nor 'colonialism' are words that do a lot of work in either Charles Heimsath's *Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform* (1964), or David Kopf's *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance* (1968), two standard texts of the day.
176. See Sarkar 1997, 104, for a sampling of some of this 1970s-era critique.
177. In an earlier review of historiography surrounding the so-called Bengal Renaissance, I suggest how revisionist historiography such as Barun De's was 'taken up and expanded' by leading voices in Subaltern Studies Collective such as Ranajit Guha and Partha Chatteree (see Hatcher 2001, p. 155).
178. Ludden 2001 contains an appendix that lists the contents of the first ten volumes of *Subaltern Studies* (430–5).
179. Compare Sugirtharaja, who argues that 'both the colonial and postcolonial constructs of Hinduism and India are closely linked with the concept of the nation-state introduced by the imperial rulers' (2008, 83).
180. It bears noting that there are those who contest the very applicability of the term 'colonialism' to address developments in South Asia during the modern era. For William Pinch, not only was India not a settler colony, but just as importantly the danger of postcolonial theory is that it blinds us to the possibility of Indian agency. He argues that if we read *bhakti* or devotional Hinduism back into our histories, we will discover that the picture is 'more imperial and less colonial' (2003, 194).
181. Hawley 2007 forms the introduction to a special issue of the *International Journal of Hindu Studies* dedicated to examining the origin and discursive function of the idea of the 'bhakti movement'.
182. Pinch (1999) provides a nuanced and comprehensive review of developments in the areas of postmodern, postcolonial and Subaltern Studies historiography, as does Eaton, 2000. The critical literature on Subaltern Studies is extensive, but for a useful review in relation to the study of Hinduism see the essay by Christian Novetzke and Laurie Patton in Mittal and Thursby, 2008.
183. Space permitting, this would be an appropriate place to expand upon important developments in South Asian visual culture within the past decade. For a useful review essay dedicated to the work of Christopher Pinney (2004) and Tapati Guha-Thakurta (2004), see Ajay J. Sinha 2007. Sinha appreciates the contributions made by these authors to identifying the complex visual practices that have shaped the expression of modern Hindu devotion and have proven so powerful for the articulation of India's postcolonial identity, but at the same time bemoans the seemingly relentless 'pull of the nation' that leads the same authors to elide the particulars of locality and difference in their focus on 'contests over the nation-space' (Sinha, 2007, p. 215).
184. It is certainly true that in recent years we have begun to benefit from detailed studies of modern Hinduism as found in its vernacular sources (see Hatcher, 1996; Dalmia, 1997; Urban, 2001a; Dodson, 2006; Stark, 2007).
185. Another way to attempt to re-vision the field is less spatial and more temporal, namely pressing harder on the nature of the precolonial while seeking ways to problematize the relationship between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in particular. For a review essay, see Travers, 2007.
186. The need to trespass rigid national boundaries should immediately suggest the need to interrogate the construction of religious boundaries during the colonial period,

especially relationships among Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians and Dalits. But beyond querying the 'invention' and ideological import of modern European taxonomies of religion (as in Masuzawa, 2005), what is needed are detailed historical studies of Hindu-Muslim, Hindu-Christian, Hindu-Sikh interaction (e.g. dialogue, debate, apologetics, lived practice, shared categories, etc.) along the lines provided by Powell, 1993 and Bauman, 2008. Chad Bauman's book is one of several important volumes in the Eerdmans series, 'Studies in the History of Christian Missions', and reveals what can be done to open up the study of Dalit identity and religion in relation to modern Hindu movements, Christian missions and the (post)colonial state.

187. One area of overlap worth flagging in the present context is the growing concern to address developments in, and the theorization of, the colonial middle class (see, for example, Waghorne, 2005; Bhattacharya, 2005; Hatcher, 2008).

188. An earlier influential work in this regard was Bayly's *Empire and Information* (1996). More recently Michael Dodson has addressed the discourse of science and the practice of translation among Orientalists and South Asian intellectuals, whether pandits or Ārya Samājists (2005 and 2007).

189. On this note, let me thank John Cort, Chad Bauman, Indrani Chatterjee, Michael Dodson and Sumit Guha, all of whom read and commented on versions of this essay. I know I haven't met all their concerns, but I appreciate their helpful suggestions.

5 Research Methods: From Manuscripts to Fieldwork

Chapter Outline

Research Methodologies in Hindu Studies

This section gives an introduction to the main approaches to studying Hinduism, and explores the different research methods that are helping to improve our understanding of its wide-ranging culture. A good research methodology is essential: the Sanskritists at the Bhandarkar Research Institute who devoted themselves to the first critical edition of the *Mahābhārata* transformed the way in which the world saw Hinduism, simply by making this popular and lively text available as a counterpoint to the predominantly Vedic, philosophical image of Hinduism. The recording of a modern enactment of the Agnicayana Vedic ritual in 1975, transformed ancient rituals known only from texts into a subject of interest to anthropologists as well as philologists.

On the other hand, misapplied methodologies can also lead to damaging mistakes, while methodological differences can create severe divisions. The view of history as a story of conquest and capitulation has led some scholars to see evidence of invasion in the remains of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, while others

see only graves. One of the problems is that the Indian religious traditions, thanks to their long duration, wide geographical spread and diverse languages, offer a vast amount of material for study. It can be difficult to understand a single area without having to master a range of associated histories, texts, languages or disciplines. Contemporary methods must find ways to represent the diversity and complexity of material, both textual and lived. An interdisciplinary approach is often necessary. Yet the positive implication of these challenges is that there is a wealth of fresh material waiting to be newly discovered, and advances in this field can make a valuable contribution to the study of religion on a wider scale.

Textual Approaches to Hinduism

Hindu culture has given rise to a vast range of texts. Many are still waiting to be discovered and archived, read in comparison with other recensions, transcribed and emended into a critical edition, translated, and studied in the context of their historical origins and compared with other texts in the same genre. While much of Hindu practices and beliefs lie outside the textual record, texts remain a major source of knowledge of the intellectual culture of Hinduism. They can also be invaluable for our reconstruction of the history of the Indian subcontinent, providing – along with archaeological remains – one of the major ways in which we can have access to the past.

The collection and study of texts is perhaps now more urgent than ever due to the need to balance out the partial and somewhat prejudiced view cultivated by the limited library to which past scholars turned. This process of compensation is under way; thus, for instance, Tantric and vernacular Bhakti texts are now receiving as much attention as Vedic texts once did. This means that the archival, linguistic and hermeneutic skills associated with textual research remain essential for contemporary scholars, requiring adequate programmes of training. The sourcing of new manuscripts or oral transmissions is also a thriving area, reflecting the need to bring to light unknown texts and new versions of known texts that can add to our knowledge of the history and intellectual culture surrounding them. Scholars such as Asko Parpola tell of forty-year searches for manuscripts that can fill the gaps in a text or genre, and resolve long-standing riddles about their origin and meaning (Parpola, 1994). Others, such as John Smith, have devoted the greater part of a career to recording and interpreting a single oral text that has become endangered by the transformations of modern Indian society (Smith, 1991).

Composition, Production and Dissemination

Written texts were created in a range of more and less durable materials including palm-leaves, birch bark, fabric and paper, and also in stone inscriptions on

buildings and monuments. These were predominantly the result of specific industries of writing, as writing materials and skills were not widely available to individuals for the majority of Indian history (as was also the case in Europe). Long-standing artisanal traditions of palm-leaf production existed from the early centuries BCE, and paper production has a long history in Nepal. Many of the technologies for creating written texts were shared across South Asia. This means that written manuscripts rarely arose as the result of independent private reflection. Rather, they were part of a broader culture of production and dissemination that usually linked them to specific communities with their own traditions of thought and practice. Many texts were authored and copied *collaboratively*, involving skilled specialist communities of scribes.

It is important to note that *written* texts often existed alongside prior *oral* versions that had been memorized for performances or of educational, legal and other purposes. In many cases writing was the end rather than the beginning of the process of composition, and one of the tasks of scholars in areas such as Vedic studies is the matching of written texts with the relevant recitation traditions of different regions. In India as in most cultures, texts composed in written form tended to be the creative output of an elite minority: the literate classes. It is clear that the courts of Indian kingdoms and the kinship communities of brahmins, both maintained a close relationship with skilled scribes who were able to produce written versions of their discussions, capturing their creative religious reflection in a more durable format. In accordance with increasingly historical approaches to reading Hindu texts, scholars are being encouraged to see works as 'enmeshed in the circumstances in which people have made them' (Ronald Inden et al., 2000, p. 3). The processes of authorship and material production are an important factor in interpreting the texts that remain available to scholars today.

Manuscript Collection and Preservation

Written texts in India exist, sometimes unstudied, in temples, archives, private collections, libraries and museums. The vast task awaits of collecting, reading and recording them in more durable forms for scholarly study. Preservation remains a major concern in India, where the climate tends to encourage decay. The texts must be maintained in controlled conditions, and may need to be treated for resistance to moisture and fungus. The preservation of many collections requires significant technological resources and funding. Recent approaches aim not only to preserve and copy the texts, but also ultimately to digitize them, creating permanent and transferable data.

Once collections have been established and secured from decay, the problem of scholarly access remains: manuscripts must be catalogued, read and indexed in order for them to become accessible to scholars. Manuscripts may be in one

of many Indian languages, from Sanskrit to Hinduism's many vernaculars including Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu, Kannada, Oriya, Bengali, Hindi, Kashmiri, Nepali and Tibetan. Some manuscripts may await attention for generations because there are too few scholars who are adequately familiar with the relevant language. Vernacular languages may also have their own range of regional dialects, posing a further challenge. Yet these linguistic variations can themselves be significant for understanding the content of a text, as when the Prakrit 'dialect' is used as a marker of social context and character in the Sanskrit dramas of Kālidāsa. Such variations highlight the importance of encouraging indigenous scholars to provide nuanced insights into their own culture that others might miss.

Paleography looks at the layout of the physical text, learning to understand the ways in which texts should be read and addressing issues of division, verse, script and punctuation. This attention to the physical artefact of the text may be important for discovering the date and circumstance of the text's production. This in turn helps to place the text within the overall context of its composition and concerns. The script itself may also be subject to variations occurring across regions and periods. In border areas there may not be a clear distinction between languages or between scripts, so scholars must be able to accommodate synthesis and morphology between different traditions of writing. Despite all these complexities, the scholar should ideally know both the material production, the language and its use within the genre of the text well enough to translate the material according to the relevant idioms and conventions, while also being able to identify mistakes and irregularities. Paleographic evidence that a text does not follow the usual process of production for a particular tradition may be used to mark it out as, for instance, less authentic than other more typical sources in relation to that tradition.

Reading, Editing and Critical Editions

Texts frequently exist in multiple versions from different times and places, requiring that a scholar compile, compare and unite them in a single 'critical edition' of the text. The first stage of this process merely involves reading and transcribing the different manuscripts, but in practice even this can be difficult. Manuscripts are often damaged, and texts themselves may contain mistakes, requiring that scholars correct them. This can be a tricky process however, as one requires significant knowledge of other versions of the text, and the wider conventions of style and genre in order to make an informed guess as to the correct change or emendation. A correction of a text that is based on purely speculative evidence rather than on any pre-existing original manuscript, is called a conjectural emendation.

In the *emendation* of Indian texts an 'eclectic' approach predominates. This means that it is common for there to be a great deal of legitimate variation between texts that are actually different versions or recensions, rather than mere mistakes. Each region, temple or family may have had its own version of a particular manual or popular narrative, and scribes may have made their own amendments in the course of copying. As a result, once the texts have been read they must be cross-referenced, and chronologically related to each other. *Stemmatics* is the reconstruction of the 'family tree' linking different versions of a single text back to common origins.

Critical editions aim to record the text in a single, most 'authentic' form. The standardized version of the text presented in a critical edition is accompanied by a 'critical apparatus' giving details of the variations that are found in other versions of the text. This means that each variation or 'witness' must be assessed according to its age, origin and affiliation, and the internal considerations of content. Different criteria for authenticity may be used. It may be the earliest version of a text, or the most common form or some external historical evidence may predispose the editor towards a particular version. In each case, the majority of known texts are assessed according to those criteria, an 'average' text is constructed, and variations are recorded in the sub-text according to the critical apparatus. The resulting text works at many levels, aiming at a balance between the variant manuscripts but creating a new 'ur-text' that may not actually exist in any single actual original version. A good critical edition should serve as a signpost to the source texts however, allowing scholars to see how the critical edition was constructed, and to identify and study any particular variant, and to gain an overview of the wider life of that text in its different major recensions, regions, scripts and degree of variation through history. In this way the critical edition aims to give scholars all they need to study the text both as a coherent unit, and as a contested and complex meta-text encompassing a range of actual manuscripts or sources.

Variations themselves pose important questions that bear on the scholar's understanding of what the 'authentic text' is. The editor must make a judgement about which texts represent the major version, and which are minor variants, and this decision may be influenced by pre-existing notions of what the text is about. Comparison of different versions often suggest that certain aspects of the text are earlier, and others are interpolations – reminding scholars of the dynamic nature of the text from the perspective of its life within the culture. But it can be difficult to verify stemmatic reconstructions of the history of the text. The *Mahābhārata*, for instance, continues to inspire debate about which aspects are original, and whether certain sections (e.g. the theologically minded 'Gītā' discourses such as the *Bhagavad Gītā* and the lesser known *Anugītā*), are independent texts inserted by a different group of authors. One can always hope

that a datable manuscript will come to light that provides a missing link in the family-tree, but stemmatic reconstruction of oral texts is much more difficult for there is no way to recover original versions that were only recited and memorized by long-dead bards, brahmins or clerics.

In studying an ideal text a scholar may have to take into account a wide range of actual texts – the medieval poem of the *Gītagovinda*, for instance, exists in manuscripts, contemporary sung versions and in temple inscriptions, and these can all be fruitfully compared for a better understanding of the text and its development. Thus variations are historically invaluable as they hit at the ways in which the production of texts worked and thus reveal the history of an essential motor of intellectual life in the subcontinent, comparable to the importance of the printing press in the European traditions. Comparative study of variations also indicates differences in thought and practice that existed between sects or regions. One editor of the *Mahābhārata* critical edition writes that an 'Ur- Mahābhārata' is 'an ideal but impossible desideratum' and that during the long history of the text most people will have worked with a distinctly local *Mahābhārata*. The regional flavour of a text can be obscured by the creation of a critical edition, making the practice of critical emendation somewhat controversial. New Philology suggests that critical emendation should be avoided, as it impedes access to the original structures of the manuscript. An alternative to the critical edition is the 'variorum' text, in which all variations are set side by side without preference.

Critical Editions: The Mahābhārata and the Skandapurāṇa

The creation of a critical edition of the *Mahābhārata* was one of the first of its kind and it has been hugely influential on the development of the field. In 1897 M. Winternitz called for a single critical edition uniting all recensions of the text 'as the only sound basis for Mahābhārata studies, nay, for all studies connected with the epic literature of India' (Suthankar, 1933, p. i).[1] However it took eleven years before a first short sample of critically edited text was presented for comment before the International Congress of Orientalists, and another eleven years before the work was begun in earnest by scholars at the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute in Poona. The resulting edition was gradually published between 1927 and 1933, and has become the foundation for most modern *Mahābhārata* scholarship.

The critical edition of the *Mahābhārata* is not uncontroversial, in many cases for reasons that are intrinsic to the process of critical editing. In

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order to produce a single text, variations that are less common numerically, but which contained key content and accorded more fully with popular knowledge of the story, were omitted. This means that the decision to include or exclude texts has essentially been based on the somewhat arbitrary circumstance of whether a large number of texts with that variant have survived. Nevertheless the edition deals admirably with the immense length and variety of this vast work, taking into account as many different regions and languages as possible. The international effort that went into the creation of the text is striking and indicative of the importance of the project.

Some influential Purāṇas still lack a critical edition, and R. Adriaensen, H. T. Bakker and H. Isaacson's text of the *Skandapurāṇa* serves as a model for future work. The critical edition grew out of a translation project at the Institute of Indian Studies at Groningen, when Harunaga Isaacson discovered a Nepalese palm-leaf manuscript that contained portions of the *Skandapurāṇa* – a compilation of myths, theologies and rituals surrounding the Śaiva deity Skanda – that were not found in the printed edition that was then current. After sourcing other manuscripts of the text in North India and Oxford, the three editors realized that they had the means to reconstruct the earliest version of the *Skandapurāṇa*.

The volume of work required for the transcription into electronic texts, cross-referencing, compilation and summary, meant that volume one, comprising the first twenty-five chapters, took seven years to produce. It includes a synopsis, history of references to the *Skandapurāṇa* in other texts, comparison with other Purāṇas, a history of the development of the different recensions of the text, and more general discussion of the principles of Purāṇa studies. Recognizing the importance of understanding the physical form that the text originally takes, the book starts with a high-quality, double-page photo of the palm-leaf manuscript itself. The transcription is accompanied by an elaborate critical apparatus through which variations in different manuscripts are referenced and divided into higher and lower levels to reflect the three main recensions and each particular variation's degree of importance.

Thus the critical edition of the *Skandapurāṇa* is not only a text, it is also a historical account of the life of this text through its transmission, separation into different versions and mutations in each version over time. The editors themselves have expressed concern over possible mistakes in the text as evidenced in their own occasional disagreements over interpretation. Like all critical editions it faces the intrinsic problem of

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producing an accessible version of one recension that is liable to overshadow other, untranscribed recensions, perhaps to their detriment. Nevertheless, with its suggestions for an effective way of organizing the critical apparatus, and its inclusion of wider contextual discussions by the editors, it also offers a template that will serve as an enduring 'contribution to Purāṇa studies', as the editors intended. It is critical editions such as these that form the basis for all future work on textual Hinduism.

Commentarial study aims to decipher the sub-text of comments that accompany the nominal 'main' text on a manuscript. The commentary can be an important tool for understanding the cultural context of the meanings of the original text. But it can also be a valuable text in its own right, showing the ways in which texts were read and interpreted, and voicing other traditions of texts or ideas that were brought into dialogue with the original at a later stage. In some cases the commentary may have been more influential on the community of reception, than the original text, which may appear obscure or dated to later generations.

More unconventional types of text that were not intended as enduring literatures for a wider public, are also coming to light as valuable scholarly material. These include clerical documents which can provide useful historical material, both about their topics, and about their authors and patrons, and legal literature which has been used by Patrick Olivelle to balance out the bias towards assuming that prescriptive texts such as the Dharma Śāstras were followed to the letter.[2] Epigraphs and inscriptions also deserve considerable attention. Usually inscriptions are intended for a public audience, and so offer a valuable insight into the messages that a given patron group or individual wished to convey to a broader section of society. Epigraphy is also essential in constructing a political chronology of India, although this project can be complicated by the fact that rulers and polities did not necessarily use an agreed, universal scheme of dating.

Oral Text, Recitation and Transmission

Throughout its history India has overwhelmingly been a culture of non-literate peoples: most genres of Hindu text were originally oral, either taking the form of versified and performed material that was passed on through specialists such

as brahmins or storytellers in a set format, or of folk or practical knowledge that was later collected in written form, as in the fragmentary spells and stories that are found in certain Vedic texts. The orality of the Vedic tradition, which had previously been seen as the pre-eminent written text for scholarly study, has now become an important focus for methods focused on the study of memorization, transmission and performance. Historians and philologists often must become anthropologists in order to collect the live oral versions of the text.

Other important oral textual traditions include the epic narratives of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata* and other *itihāsa* or mythic and religious stories, and the 'songs' or poems of *bhakti* saints across India. Stories told as a form of social interaction in communities gradually took on more formal structures that led to their concretization as a set 'oral text'. Other, more scientific or philosophical texts may also have started in oral form – discussions between physicians comparing practice and results make their way into the *Caraka Saṃhitā*, the teachings of thinkers in a philosophical *sampradāya* are recorded in note-form in the Sūtra; ideas were rarely recorded directly into written form, and oral culture was the primary medium of both popular and elite reflection.

Versification of a text plays a major role in the process of oral text formation. We can guess that many of the stories in the Purāṇas for instance, existed as a narrative told in different ways by different people – this is why we can find quite diverse versions of certain myths. But their versification into a memorizable version fixes the specific words of the story, creating a 'text' that can be transmitted word-for-word by storytellers as well as in written manuscripts. Verse does admit of additions and alterations, but because the metres used in Indian languages tend to be well-defined in their syllables and stresses, changes become more difficult and are easier to spot. In some cases texts were subject to a meticulous technique for ensuring correct memorization in which the texts would be memorized forwards, then also backwards, syllable by syllable, providing a way to counteract the usual semantic alteration of oral texts according to meaning. This method may well have proved more effective in ensuring a consistent transmission than the scribal culture of copying texts in the West, which was notoriously subject to mistakes and additions.

Some kinds of Hindu text developed as a response to the creative restrictions imposed by these compositional structures. The story-within-a-story narrative structure found in the *Mahābhārata* may derive from this necessity of maintaining the original text while adding fresh material to it.

Oral texts are also subject to quite different aesthetic concerns from written texts. Most texts, being versified (not least for easier memorization) are song-like and subject to aural rhythm, pitch and accent. In some cases recitation may be quite abstract and formulaic as is usually the case in Vedic performance; in others recitation may be more expressive, featuring a greater contribution

from the artist. In contrast to performed texts, other oral material circulated as informal folk narratives or sayings, and their sources present some of the most elusive texts for study. The origins of doctrines of rebirth that make their first written appearances in the *Upaniṣads*, for instance, remain difficult to capture, appearing to have been generated at an oral level of discourse 'beneath' the discourse of the formal texts that are available to us. The phrase ' . . . *iti*', ' . . . thus it is said', is a common fixture in many types of Sanskrit text.

Nevertheless, oral texts might be said to have predominated for the majority of Hindus, and public recitation has been the most common form of access to texts.[3] Today, despite strikingly high literacy rates in some communities such as in Kerala and in diaspora communities, many Hindus still know texts exclusively in their oral, sung or chanted versions or merely in fragments through their aphoristic citation in everyday discourse, even though those texts are widely available in print. It is becoming clear that many texts await scholarly attention not in archives, but in communities, in homes and at gatherings where the text takes place as a recitation that needs to be recorded and transcribed, possibly across a range of performances and venues in order to take into account contextual variation. John Smith's study of the epic of Pabuji (Smith, 1991) gave an example of the way in which the concretization of an oral text crosses the disciplinary divide between textual and anthropological study. Smith's project aimed to produce a CD-Rom version of the research including audio and visual extracts alongside the transcribed and translated text. Oral texts present a challenge to scholars who must find new ways of locating, recording and contextualizing them. Yet they cannot be ignored as they constitute the primary form of text for the majority of Hindus throughout history, not a marginal form of secondary folk culture as was once thought.

From a religious perspective, it is significant that oral texts are often seen as the more natural and powerful form of text. While written texts were rarely accorded great significance, the spoken performance of the Vedas and epics are important events in religious culture. One example is that the mantra – the powerful word-weapon of the heroes – was envisioned as aural in nature. The Vedas are, as Smith puts it, 'holy in performance' rather than as written volumes (Smith, 1990, p. 18). Oral language has a significance that written language lacks in Hindu cultures. From a historical perspective, the pervasive importance of text-memorization made oral text a crucial cultural medium, more transferable and more hardy than other cultural media such as the material arts. It meant that texts could travel with people, and that – as distinct from the slow and laborious manuscript-copying culture of the West – new influences could be assimilated through the more permeable boundaries of these texts. Certainly the past and present orality of Hindu culture has had an enormous impact on the historical dynamics of the religious tradition as a whole.

Translation and Philological Study

Philologists explore the grammar and vocabulary of the language in historical perspective, bringing this to bear on the interpretation of individual manuscripts. A sense of the origins and morphology of the language can give a richer sensitivity to the semantic resonance of a text. It also illuminates the history of the language within the culture, shedding light on issues of transmission and change. As such it is related to linguistic anthropology which looks at the sociocultural setting of language. Philology plays a particularly important role in the study of Indian cultures where so many different languages existed in a constant change and interplay. The subtleties of negotiating a varied web of language communities can be difficult to perceive at such historical distance. Scholars have begun to explore the ways in which grammatical structures and rules (as for instance those formalized to such a high degree in Sanskrit through grammatical texts such as the Aṣṭādhyāyī of *Pāṇini*) were applied beyond the language communities from which they grew, creating a broader meta-culture in which the structures of multiple languages could be understood despite differences.[4] The implications are that from an early period, the wider literate community of India explicitly recognized its linguistic complexity, and the need to formalize the language and establish bridges for inter-regional comprehension. The extent of agreement between parallel versions of key texts such as the Vedas, *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* in different languages throughout the subcontinent, attests the success of Indian literati in negotiating linguistic difference and change.

Translations depend on far more than knowledge of the equivalent meanings of words and grammatical forms. The interpretation of words, particularly where there is no living community to legislate on correctness, is open to considerable ambiguity. Words may have multiple meanings within a single genre, and the scholar must be versed in a range of different contexts of use. Naturally, certain forms of language provide more scope for lexical ambiguity than others: metaphors and ellipses invite speculation, while the poetic language of devotional hymns, and the condensed and allusive texts of Sūtras can also cause confusion. The grammatically ambiguous sentences found in many Sūtras give an example of a text that requires a strong background knowledge from the interpreter, although in some cases their semantic ambiguity may be intentional and needs to be preserved in translation. In poetic texts, parallel meanings may be intentionally overlaid through the juxtaposition of words with multiple referents, similes and metaphors. These simultaneous meanings may be essential to the integration of different discourses within a single text, as when a poetic description or narrative account presents a second theological or metaphysical significance. These ambiguities, intentional and otherwise, present a challenge for the interpreter.

As in all translation, the scholar must also strive to give a sense of the style and voice of the text in the new language, necessitating a wider familiarity with other instances of the genre through historical research and creative translations. Such translations can never be an absolute reflection of the original text, but may rather represent the revelation of particular aspects – thus, for instance, different translations of the *Ujjvala Nīlamaṇi* of Rūpa Gosvāmi might produce very different works depending on whether they privilege the straightforward narratives, the theological and metaphysical references, or the aesthetic terminology that co-exist in the work.

Issues in the Translation of Hindu Texts: The *Bhagavad Gītā*

The *Bhagavad Gītā* has inspired many commentaries and translations within the Hindu tradition, notably in the classical period by the Advaitins Śaṅkara and Madhusudana Sarasvatī, Vaiṣṇavas Rāmānuja, Mādhva, and Vallabha, and also Śaivas such as Abhinavagupta, and in the modern period by M. K. Gandhi, Radhakrishnan, Chinmayānanda, A. C. Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupada, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Sathya Sai Baba and others. These tend to root the author's own theology in a close reading of a text which has turned out to be highly multi-valent despite its relatively clear Sanskrit style. Early commentators effectively suggested a potential plurality of 'Gītās' with a wide range of different interpretations, and Sharma prefaces his discussion of the interpretations by Bhaskara, Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja and Mādhva by sounding, as he puts it, 'the bugle for hermeneutical warfare' (Sharma, 1986, p. x). As Will Johnson puts it, 'just as there can be no definitive performance of a Shakespeare play, so there can be no definitive translation of a text such as the *Gītā* – which is why so many have been attempted' (Johnson, 1994, p. xxi).

Thus, for instance, verse 4.10, which touches on the controversial question of the deity Kṛṣṇa's preferred modes of devotion and union with his devotees, has been translated in ways which suggest quite different soteriological goals. Van Buitenen stresses the monistic implications of the last words, 'mad-bhāvam āgatāḥ', literally, 'come to my being':

> There have been many who, rid of passions, fears and angers, and made pure by the austerities of insight, have immersed themselves in me, resorted to me, and become of one being with me. (van Buitenen, 1997, p. 38)

(*Continued*)

He also shows an awareness of the yogic background of the text in translating 'jñāna-tapasā' – literally 'knowledge-asceticism' or 'knowledge-suffering' as 'austerities of insight'. In his translation of the same verse, R. C. Zaehner generally agrees but leaves the final goal rather more ambiguous – one 'shares' in the divine 'mode' rather than coming to its being. Reaching out to contemporary Western audiences perhaps, he also introduces phrases with Christian connotations such as 'sanctuary' and 'penance', and introduces the biblical capitalization of the divine first person as 'Me':

> Many are they who, passion, fear and anger spent, inhere in Me, making Me their sanctuary; made pure by wisdom and hard penances, they come to [share in] my own mode of being. (Zaehner, 1969, p. 185)

Juan Mascaro, who lectured on Spanish mysticism, fills his translation with Christian language ('Spirit', 'peace') aimed at linking the mystical tenor of this text to contexts that would be more familiar to Western readers. He also keeps the tone positive by giving an alternative rendering of 'tapasā' as fire rather than suffering:

> How many have come to me, trusting in me, filled with my Spirit, in peace from passions and fears and anger, made pure by the fire of wisdom! (Mascaro, 1962, p. 23)

A. C. Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupada, who follows a strongly devotional and dualistic interpretation gives a very loose translation, but offsets the bias of his own rendering by making the original Sanskrit text available beside each verse, both in the original devanāgarī script and in transliteration, with a word-for-word lexicon:

> Being freed from attachment, fear and anger, being fully absorbed in Me and taking refuge in Me, many, many persons in the past became purified by knowledge of Me – and thus they all attained transcendental love for Me. (Prabhupada, 1986, p. 232)

Here Vedāntic questions regarding the sense in which the devotee attains to Kṛṣṇa's 'being' are avoided by Prabhupada's translation of *bhava* as referring to 'emotion', 'love', following the lead of early-modern aestheticians and bhakti theologians. Finally, Geoffrey Parrinder gives a

(*Continued*)

translation that is of interest in its attempt to preserve the rhythmic and broadly rhyming structure of the verse:

> Relieved of passion, fear and hate,
> with me their refuge, full of me,
> many have come to share my state
> made pure by wisdom's austerity. (Parrinder, 1974, p. 25)

Each translation of a text can be seen as of value in relation to its particular goals. Recognizing the focus and preferences of the translation at the outset can allow us to appreciate its value, and more than one translation can be juxtaposed to reveal the semantic richness of a single text. Lipner suggests that this requires the scholar to engage in 'psychological archaeology, viz. unearthing in a systematic and informed manner the selective personal factors underlying one's academic approach and expertise' (Lipner, 1997, p. vii). Ironically, it is in providing this 'raw' resource for studying Hindu traditions – translations – that the subjective biases of scholars are most transparent.

Generally, translators are well aware of the lexical ambiguities and the diversity of the different styles or languages that they must face in trying to bring the text into a new language. Vedic Sanskrit uses grammatical forms that are alien both to the clear Sanskrit of the *Mahābhārata*, and the elaborate, allegorical style of Sanskrit classical literature, with its long compounds and esoteric word-play. But the greatest challenge is the translation of textual features with which readers in other languages may not be familiar, such as words with no equivalent, with more than one meaning or which link in meaning or in sound with other parts of the text. Different devices have been used to try and convey the untranslatable characteristics of the original texts. A common strategy is to leave key terms in the original language and either add an extensive discussion explaining them in greater detail, or leave the reader to research their meaning independently.

Hume's very early English translation of the Upaniṣads aims both to enthuse and educate, making its reader comfortable with imaginative renderings of phrases, while filling in the relevant Sanskrit in brackets so that the nuanced translation acts almost as a gloss: the appellation *śloka-krt*, literally the 'maker of epic-style verses', becomes 'fame-maker!'. Unusual verbs are given in their root forms, and key concepts are given in both languages – world-order is explained as *ṛta*, and *upaniṣad* is literally translated as 'mystic doctrine' (Hume,

1921, p. 293). Similarly Winthrop Sargeant's 1979 'interlinear translation' of the *Bhagavad Gītā* aimed to introduce the reader to the script, sound and meaning of the text at once.

Retaining the style of a text can be essential for understanding the effect it is supposed to have on the intended audience, and thus for revealing 'a text's consequences rather than its sources' (Coburn, 1991, p. 30). However, style is particularly difficult to convey in another language. For this reason, in his translation of the *Devī-Māhātmya,* Coburn retains and highlights the original text's 'obvious repetitiveness of phrase' as a way of 'affirming the bardic qualities' of formulaic construction in the Purāṇas. Will Johnson translates the *śloka* and *triṣṭubh* metres used in the *Bhagavad Gītā* in different-sized font to indicate that the text is shifting from one register to another (Johnson, 2009).

Some translators have opted to attempt an evocative style that correlates with that of the original rather than prioritizing accuracy; thus for instance *Speaking of Śiva*, a translation of Śaiva devotional poetry in medieval Kannada by A. K. Ramanujan, himself an author of fiction and poetry in the languages out of which he was translating, is acclaimed for its poetic qualities rather than its literal accuracy. He achieves this, he wrote, not randomly but by trying 'to attend closely to the language of the originals, their design, detail by detail; not to match the Kannada with the English, but to *map* the medieval Kannada onto the soundlook of modern English; in rhythm and punctuation, in phrase-breaks, paragraphs, and lineation to suggest the inner form of the originals' (Ramanujan, 1973, p. 13). He quotes Valery's notion that a successful translation is really one that is able 'to reconstitute as nearly as possible the effect of a certain cause'. Certainly, one effect of his translation, in which anglicized features such as punctuation were removed, was greater appreciation of the distinct literary qualities of the South Indian devotional corpus.

Many genres were highly inter-referential, with the authors constantly referring to verses from other, often un-named works. The Jaiminīya Śrauta-Sūtra-vrtti commentary, for instance, only references the text of the Jaiminīya-Śrauta-Sūtra by citing the first and last syllables of each rule that it glosses. Attempting to incorporate this assumed knowledge into reader's experience, some translators have tried to name such texts, or provide fuller references where only partial ones are given. Others have simply omitted the references from translations in the interest of accessibility, reflecting like A. J. Alston in regard to Śaṅkara's works, that the original author 'could assume that his readers knew the [relevant texts] by heart, and . . . [therefore] frequently piles up ringing quotations of phrases from them to arouse echoes that no other modern reader but a traditionally-educated Hindu would catch' (Alston, 1980, p. iv). Alston chooses philosophical accessibility in his translation, over fidelity to the style of discourse – greater perspicuity in the motivations behind translations could encourage readers both to identify and selectively benefit from those

biases, while reminding them to consult the original language text standing behind each version. As Doniger observes, 'Real scholars will read the Rig Veda in Sanskrit; would be scholars, or scholars from other fields, will fight their way through the translations of Geldner (German), Renou (French), Elizarenkova (Russian) and others; they will search the journals for articles on each verse, and on each word, they will pore over the dictionaries and the concordances' (Doniger, 1981, p. 11). Perhaps an increased number of facing page translations offering both the original versions and translated versions will help to encourage readers to engage with the texts directly, while introducing fresh interest in the original languages themselves.

A number of 'Readers' have been published, aiming to facilitate an improved study of Hinduism at first-hand through its texts. These have often followed the standard 'canon' of *Ṛg Veda*, Upaniṣads, *Bhagavad Gītā*, selections from the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*, selections from the *Mānava Dharma Śāstra*, selections from the Purāṇas, Bhakti literature and modern Hindu writings from thinkers such as Vivekananda, Aurobindo or Gandhi. Others have tried to vary this range; Olson aims to represent the most popular devotional sects more fully by including sections on Vaiṣṇava, Kṛṣṇa, Rāma and Sant, Śaiva, Goddess and Tantric texts. As the field advances, specialist readers are starting to appear, focusing on families of texts such as the Purāṇas (Dimmitt, 1978), or on the 'conversation' of texts that shaped the Hindu Nationalist Movement (Jaffrelot, 2007). A few have sought to introduce radically new material, genuinely aiming at a supporting a revised programme of study; Donald Lopez's *Religions of India in Practice* juxtaposes specialist translations of predominantly unknown texts from a wide range of Indian religions and regions (including Sikh, Jain and Muslim texts) and from genres that include not only devotional hymns but also ritual instructions, popular biographies, reflection on inter/intra-religious tensions (Lopez, 1995).

Textual and Contextual Criticism

Textual criticism includes a variety of techniques developed in the analysis of Greek, Roman and biblical texts, aimed at reconstructing their original form and meaning by taking into account the structures of the text. It compares the language, structure, style and themes within texts to identify consistencies and inconsistencies. The resulting analysis may suggest that there are different layers of composition within a single text. Textual criticism is made more difficult in many Hindu contexts where texts combine both written and oral composition, and authorship is anonymous or attributed to authors who cannot be traced back to any historical figure (such as the sage Vyāsa to whom a wide range of Epic and other texts are attributed). This can result in complex textual

structures in which different topics, styles and speech levels combine, or texts open out into 'Russian doll' structures in which stories within stories, or comments within comments are overlaid.

Commentary can help by providing a guide to meaning, but commentaries can also distort and deflect meanings according to the prejudices of the commentator. Some scholars take commentary as important for contextualizing the semantic range and ideas, but not necessarily for choosing meaning, as commentary is almost intrinsically linked to polemical interpretation. One of the tasks of textual criticism is to illuminate chronology by analysing internal patterns reflecting the redaction of what may originally have been different texts. Thus, while the *Mahābhārata* is believed within Hindu tradition to be the work of the sage Vyāsa (whose name actually means 'editor' or 'arranger'), scholars have suggested that its core is the result of the interweaving of an original text of about 7,000 verses, with secondary later texts attributed to Vaiśampāyana. Others have suggested that the different 'voices' in the text, whether connected to themes or to characters, reflect multiple contributors with distinct agendas. It is easy for essentially commentarial elaborations on theological and philosophical matters to be incorporated into texts as an apparently seamless part of the narrative.

However it is important to see a text as far more than merely a collection of words to be examined in isolation, and many texts require contextual criticism in order to be correctly understood. A text may be embedded in a performance context that means that scholars must take into account cosmology, life-rituals and other frame-work circumstances in any attempt to understand them fully. Texts also reflect factors to which scholars have limited access such as the history of the author individually and of the society in the period of composition. While it is difficult to gain access to facts about individual lives (with one exception being the hagiography of those 'saints' who established their own schools or *sampradāyas*), more work could be done to reconstruct the shape that individual lives took in different periods, particularly in relation to the classes and communities which produced the material studied today. Social history is becoming increasingly important in the hermeneutics of Hindu texts. We can now see the socio-economic struggle between brahmins and their aristocratic patrons behind epics stories, just as we can see anti-Buddhist rhetoric behind Śaṅkara's Advaitic philosophy, and inter-sectarian polemic animating the many sophisticated Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva theologies of the medieval and early-modern periods. Textual study must, then, be complemented with historical, sociological, linguistic, aesthetic and other information which gives us not merely the concrete artefact of the text, but also the broader history-dependent, culturally embedded text that is able to illuminate Hindu tradition (Silverstein and Urban, 1996, pp. 1–3). All of this means that scholars must become well-versed in the

relevant genre of literature and the relevant period of history in order to read their chosen texts with full understanding.

From the fact that there is often no single author and circumstance of composition to provide a context from which a stable interpretation can be calculated, it follows that our idea of the meaning of texts must be revised to encompass different sections with different meanings at different times and for different communities. The very act of reading must admit the relativism of interpretation throughout the text's history, and thus scholars must always be specific about the interpretive context that they are studying. Traditional Western approaches to text as the testimony of a single authorial subjectivity must be paradigmatically revised for the facts and self-understanding of textual traditions in India. It is possible that rather than dealing with discrete texts conveying concrete meanings, we can learn to deal with a 'living, changing scale of texts':

> Instead of looking at them as dead monuments, as mere sources of factual information or the expression of a creative and exotic genius that we can only appreciate in itself for itself, or as the accidental expression/sedimentation of some larger structure or context, we want to see them as living arguments both in their historic usages and by virtue of our reenactment of their arguments, in our own present . . . To approach texts as the dialogical utterances of complex authors in a shifting scale of texts would go far to help those who have been trained as philologists and historians. (Inden et al., 2000, pp. 14–15)

Contextual Criticism: Interpreting the Gītā

The search for a correct understanding of historical context is demonstrated in recent approaches to the *Bhagavad Gītā.* Angelika Malinar's study focuses on source criticism, seeking to map the different concerns and communities that the *Gītā* is addressing onto the relevant parts of the text. She begins with questions which assume that, however persistently it has been viewed as a single, discreet text, the *Bhagavad Gītā* is actually the product of a complex history of authorship, incorporating historically determined concerns.

> How are we to understand the text having been handed down as part of the *Mahābhārata* (Mbh) epic? What are the threads which

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> connect the different ideas and levels of argument that build up the text, and how were they twisted and woven in order to put forward philosophical and theological frameworks of meaning? What are the characteristic features of the philosophy of the *Bhagavad Gītā* that explain its influence and paradigmatic role in subsequent Hindu traditions? Can we adduce evidence to connect the *Bhagavad Gītā* to specific cultural-historical contexts? (Malinar, 2008, p. 1)

Later she shows how the study of the diverse contexts of the *Gītā* can actually shed new light on its doctrines:

> The BhG is related to other parts and texts of the epic in different ways. It is connected to the religious and philosophical discourses on asceticism, karman and right knowledge, as well as samkhya and yoga, to teachings on fate and the ages of the world, to the appearances of other gods, the role of the hero and god Kṛṣṇā, and to discourses on dharma in the third and twelfth books of the epic. (Malinar, 2008, p. 35)

Malinar's approach is to deal not with authors, so much as redactors – editors of the textual sources that feed into the *Bhagavad Gītā* – and the strategies they used to express doctrines that were in turn shaped by their historical context. Malinar's version of the *Gītā* is a conversation: a set of rhetorical reactions to the voices of the many groups present in the intellectual culture in which these redactors stood, from the pragmatic popularity of the Buddhists, to the ascetic extremism of the Jains, and the metaphysics of the Sāṃkhya and Vedāntic schools.

Others have emphasized the theological perspectives – including Vedic, Sāṃkhya, ascetic, bhakti and even tribal – that have shaped the outlook of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, seeing them not as separate pieces of a patchwork, but as the legitimate concerns to which the 'contextual theology' of the Gītā was responding (Lipner, 2000). Still others have sought to understand it as a coherent literary creation that is tightly woven into the plot, themes and language of the *Mahābhārata* (van Buitenen, 1981). The interpretive issues arising from the *Gītā* are so wide-ranging that it has inspired a whole journal (the *Journal of Studies in the Bhagavad Gītā*) devoted to exploring its meaning both in respect of its origins and its influence throughout subsequent history, both in India and across the world.

Just as the Christian and Jewish versions of the Bible have been usefully analysed as literary texts, so too this approach can be applied to Hindu texts. Perhaps the majority of Hindu texts are written in verse, a fact which indicates that the authors were concerned with stylistic issues. The Ṛg Vedic texts have received considerable attention as poetry, and even the more speculative material can be illuminated by this approach, as Brereton has shown in relation to the *Ṛg Veda* (Brereton, 1999). He writes that 'Vedic poetry, like all poetry, expresses meaning not only through its semantics but through sound, structure, metrics, and the conventions of the poetic tradition in which it is embedded', reminding scholars to pay attention to form as well as content. Other techniques of literary analysis can also be applied to Hindu texts, as in the case of the controversial Freudian analysis of Purāṇic texts by Wendy Doniger.

The Ideology of Textual Tradition, Scripture and Genre

In some cases, the dynamic and shifting families of texts have been reified into 'scriptural traditions'. A textual tradition can be defined in a number of ways: the author or authors of the text may be affiliated with a certain tradition. A text may be composed with the intention to reflect certain stylistic trends that operate more widely in the culture. Or the affiliation to a particular tradition may be imposed subsequently through a retrospective identification of common styles, concerns and historical influences. In some cases, a network of traditions codifying a chain of textual authority, was established through direct citation – the Upaniṣads quote the Vedas, the *Bhagavad Gītā* quotes the Upaniṣads, devotional literature and Vedāntic theology quote the *Bhagavad Gītā*, and such literatures quote and comment upon each other. Some scholars have sought to discover the mechanisms of choice and adjudication by which certain texts become definitive of a tradition. This is often a difficult process to study, as claims to authority, which appear as a *faitaccompli* in the literature, sometimes hide a struggle for power between different sects or followers through which preference for one or another canon was established, as Tony Stewart has tried to show with reference to the formulation of an accepted hagiography of Caitanya, the founder of the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava tradition (Stewart, 2010).

The texts within a Hindu tradition may assume considerable authority through a claim to revelatory origins. The text may be classed as *śruti*, a 'heard' insight into ultimate reality as in the case of the orthodox Vedas (perceived by often anonymous sages or *ṛṣis*) and also the unorthodox Tantras (heard by later sages who were thought to have access to new levels of truth, often revealed directly by Śiva or another god). Or a text may be categorized as *smṛti*, a remembered account of historical events. In both cases, the text is thought to have an

empirical basis in direct perception of the truths (eternal or temporal) which it records.

On the Vedic model, *śruti* is not generally understood to be a direct verbal communication from a divine speaker, as for instance in the *Qur'an*. In the Vedas there is no divine speaker 'telling' the truths being revealed. Rather these texts are the testimony of sages who have directly perceived metaphysical truths. This gives them a different kind of authority to that accorded to revelations in the Abrahamic religions. In Hindu cases the vision or 'hearing' of the word correlates with an apprehension of cosmic truth itself, and the authority of Hindu text, whether written or oral, is thus not primarily that of a prescriptive command, but rather that of a descriptive truth about what is already *in situ* as an eternal state of affairs. Such authoritative statements cannot thus easily be argued with or opposed, and the cosmic foundation of their knowledge adds a distinctive flavour to the Hindu notions of orthodox (*āstika*) truth. It also impacts on the epistemological and evidential character of such texts; Śaṅkara, for instance, defends the centrality of the Vedic texts for acquiring knowledge of Brahman, on the basis that they give access to truths that cannot be known through normal forms of perception. However the development of strongly theistic traditions, as seen in the *Bhagavad Gītā* and some Purāṇas and Tantras where theological material is presented in the form of divine speeches set within a narrative framework, moves towards an understanding of scripture as a personal communication given by the deity with the explicit purpose of leading humans to liberation. But this is by no means the norm for all Hindu 'scripture'.

The tradition of Vedic hermeneutics introduced a further view of all language as not only a passive source of information, but also an active injunction to action. This view developed in the context of the composition of the Vedas for the express purpose of offering a manual for ritual action. As more speculative material entered the tradition, the injunctive notion of language was retained by certain groups, including the *Pūrva Mīmāṃsā* grammarians such as the medieval Śaivas of Kashmir (Sanderson, 1985). In addition to visionary and injunctive language, Sanskrit in particular was seen as possessed of an intrinsic power or energy which made it an essential feature of ritual, and even in the *Mahābhārata* a weapon that could be obtained through hard trials and used against enemies.

One of the most potent yet problematic forms of this authoritative reification is the elevation of the Sanskrit tradition above other regional textual traditions thereafter classed as subsidiary 'vernaculars', both by its proponents within Hindu culture and by academic scholars. The hegemony of Sanskrit was based on both ideological and practical roots: on the one hand, Sanskrit had proclaimed itself as what Sheldon Pollock has called a language of the Gods. Deshpande traces the development of Sanskritic scriptural ideology to the simple authority ascribed to effective incantations in the pragmatic magical

goals of Vedic ritual. Those utterances which circumstance caused to be seen as powerful, were repeated, retained and spread (Deshpande in Mittal and Thursby (eds), 2002, p. 507). Gradually speech itself was deified, and language became associated with creative power, both in the Vedic hymns to deities of language, and in the later Tantric use of *mantras* to 'remake' reality or oneself. The Mīmāṃsā school of exegetic philosophy saw language as having a natural affinity with the ordering structure of the universe, which lends it ontological significance. The Pūrva Mīmāṃsā exegetes believed that analysis of reality could be done through analysis of language, and thinkers such as Yaska, Durgā and Bhartrhari pursued an understanding of Brahman in this way. Thus the Veda was seen in Brahminical tradition and in later notions of *śruti* as being anādi and *apauruṣeya* – without beginning, and uncreated by man.

The Ideology of Hindu Languages – Sanskrit, Tamil and Other Vernaculars

The Sanskrit language has passed through numerous societal functions, gradually becoming replaced in general use – and in some cases in religious significance – by vernaculars. From the language of a limited community, to the ritualized language of the Vedic *yajñā*, Sanskrit became implicated in the growing cosmopolitan culture of the northern portion of the subcontinent, becoming a banner for the ideology and order of the states which were asserting themselves over the more atomic village cultures that had formed the texture of most of India previously. Pollock notes that its history is not unlike that of Latin, in its elevation as the marker of a dominant state and later a culture that overflowed political boundaries, only to be gradually subsumed by the more intimate and local connotations of regional vernaculars (Pollock, 2006).

South Indian languages have maintained their own religious and cultural significance within alternative traditions of literature. Tamil has also been elevated to a special status, associated less with the intrinsic efficacy of ritual than with the initial blossoming of devotional poetry in the first instance, and with the expression of pride in the Tamil cultural heritage in the second. Tamil boasts a heritage of '*Caṅkam*' poetry, a literary tradition that inspired the style of later Tamil works. This poetic tradition alludes to a range of southern Gods, but it is not primarily religious in nature. One exception, the *Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai* which is devoted to the God Murugan who remains popular in southern India today, marks

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the transition towards Tamil as a mode of devotional literature with a distinctive style privileging personal expression and the emotive description of landscape and everyday activities.

The songs of the South Indian Āḻvār saints circulated through India from the seventh century onwards, inspiring a flourishing of devotional literature throughout India. Indeed, the *Tiruvaymoli* by Nammāḻvār came to be called the 'Tamil Veda', indicating that it acquired a comparable degree of sacredness and soteriological efficacy in the eyes of his followers. Tamil devotional poems came to be incorporated into temple worship in a way that was analogous to Vedic Sanskrit. But where Sanskrit was associated with the authority of the brahminical class and culture, the use of Tamil poetry in temples to some degree bridged the gap between the religious specialist (here the saintauthor of the poem) and the devotee. In more recent developments, one can clearly see sociopolitical motivations at work, as Tamil language becomes the banner for a broader cultural liberation movement. Sumathi Ramaswamy has documented the contemporary deification of Tamil language as the expression of an ancient and sacred identity (Ramaswamy, 1997).

Beyond the power-culture-scripture matrix on which both Sanskrit and Tamil drew, other vernaculars came to represent ideologies that were almost diametrically opposed. Hindi, and in particular, its dialect Brajbhāṣa were linked to the region around the Yāmuna river (now in Uttar Pradesh) in which Kṛṣṇa was believed to have lived, and it became synonymous with the popular and powerful devotional style of poems by writers such as Surdas and Tulsīdās. In Maharashtra, Marathi literatures have been the source of much cultural pride, and in Kerala, Malayalam became a language associated with performative forms of Hinduism, in some of which *śūdras*, or untouchables were religious specialists. Bengali has also become associated with its own distinct cultural history in which charismatic devotionalism, the cosmopolitan milieu of Islamic courts, and the theological pamphleteering of nineteenth- and twentieth-century individuals have contributed to a rich heritage associated with modes of individualistic religious self-expression.

In a non-scriptural context, the categorization of texts into genres has been very influential on the forms of Hindu expression, providing stylistic templates within which most composition took place. Many different styles existed both in expository reflection and in the arts. The Sūtras established a terse, transferable format for recording the views of philosophical schools, while the accepted

format of citation and elaboration in the commentarial tradition ensured that, on the whole, commentaries remain comprehensible to those who may not have access to the original text. Purāṇas gave emerging theistic movements a form through which to explain and legitimate themselves. The 'songs' of devotional figures established a way for the public to share in and accept their ecstatic innovations. Yet it is important to note the flexibility that exists within the bounds of that authoritative template. As Tony Stewart puts it, drawing on the adoption of aesthetic genres by devotional writers in the early modern period:

> . . . it would have been impossible for Rūpa Gosvāmi to adapt the tenets of R*asa Śāstra* to the devotional world without depending on, but ultimately disagreeing with his illustrious predecessors in the hopes of clarifying the propositions of the prior texts, a very subtle kind of conflict. But it was also in the nature of most of these arguments to base themselves on foregone conclusions in their rules of discourse. (Stewart, 2010, p. 9)

Certain genres deserve more attention than they have received in the past – Tantric, vernacular and Purāṇic literature are being recognized as essential references for an understanding of devotional tradition, worship and pilgrimage. In the area of philosophy, the past emphasis on Vedānta needs to be balanced by attention to other traditions such as Vaiśeṣika and Sāṃkhya. It is possible that Sāṃkhya in particular may have been (and possibly continues to be) as influential as Vedānta as an underlying ideology in everyday life and popular culture. The textual resources for a balanced historical view of Hinduism lie in the hands of today's archivists and translators.

Historical Approaches to Hinduism

Hinduism's history is a long and complex one, expanding well beyond the boundaries of India into Pakistan, Nepal, Tibet, Bangladesh, Thailand, Sri Lanka and today into key diaspora communities in East and South Africa, the UK, the Caribbean and North America. As such it has represented a challenge to historians who have tried to fit it into a neat chronological periodization. Few members of Hindu culture itself have kept a comprehensive record of events in the style of Herodotus, the historian who lies at the roots of Western historiography. This is partly because until recently there was no self-consciously unified single culture of India, or of Hinduism; rather numerous polities with permeable boundaries and multi-faceted religious cultures flourished in and around what we today identify as the Indian subcontinent. Consequently, to give a history of Hinduism is to give a history of many different states, cultures and theologies, just as a good history of Christianity takes into account Eastern, Asian, African and Western traditions with very different stories and theologies.

With no single standard narrative of Hindu history to turn to, the historian is free to tell a range of different histories at individual, community, regional levels; cultural or imperial levels, and in relation to different groups of people and different kinds of events. History is essentially a narrativized chronology, but a 'story of the past' can take many forms, from a bare timeline of births and battles, to a psychologically nuanced tale of individual decision-making, or a broad sweep of advancing ideas. There has been a move to incorporate hidden or alternative histories of groups whose experience has not been represented, such as women and village cultures that carried on 'under the radar' of the literate traditions on which conventional histories are based.

However, traditional socio-political approaches to Hindu history are also enjoying a renewed popularity, with scholars using them as hermeneutical keys to understand the influence of patronage and political power on religion. This has helped to clarify many factors that remained vague in previous accounts, including the place of urban patronage in the development of renouncer traditions and, later, the culture of temple worship. Each new perspective cumulatively helps historians to understand the unfolding of Hindu cultures.

Histories of Hinduism: From Basham to Doniger

A. L. Basham's *The Wonder That Was India* was influential in presenting a clear and accessible story of Indian history, and this framework was built upon in his lectures on Hindu history in 1984–1985 which were subsequently edited into *The Origins and Development of Classical Hinduism*, which charts a now-familiar periodized history of early Hinduism up to, approximately, the writing of the *Bhagavad Gītā* (Basham, 1954, 1991). Basham was not a dilettante; his research was supported by study of Sanskrit at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London and drew on original texts. Much of his vision of classical India is retained in current views. Nevertheless his historical presentation of Hinduism suffered from a textual bias that resulted in omitting traditions that were largely non-textual or ill-represented by the texts that were then available to scholarship. In addition, it preserved some of the colonial bias to view Hinduism as a classical civilization rather than a contemporary tradition; this was reflected in the past tense of the title, 'The Wonder That Was India'.

A student of Basham's, Romila Thapar has transformed the study of Indian history by reflecting contemporary methodological shifts in historiography in her own representation of Hindu history. Her

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chronology uses temples, inscriptions, genealogies and evidence of trade, as well as traditional texts. Her historical narrative incorporates the ideas of counter-culture and cultural propaganda as a corrective to the voice of the mainstream elite recorded in most of the 'classical' texts on which Basham had drawn. Her early work broke new ground by exploring traditions of dissent rather than the preservation of authority (Thapar, 1979), and her study of art and patronage echoed the concern of Marxist historical analysis to reveal ideologies that promote political ends (Thapar, 1994). By using the trend for economic perspectives on society to focus on relationships that were enacted through trade, migration and conflict, her history paints a multi-cultural picture of India as developing through the influence of Buddhism, Jainism and Islam as well as Hindu religions, and as interacting with Greek, Persian and East Asian cultures (Thapar, 1966). Ever sensitive to the interplay between religion, politics and academic representations, she has courted controversy in her opposition to what she saw as politically motivated changes made in textbook histories of Hinduism both in India and the USA. She herself refuses to receive state awards for her work, accepting only the recognition of academic institutions.

If Thapar's focus on economic forces, migration and propaganda was intended as a revisionary response to Basham's classically elitist history of 'kings, wars, and texts', there has recently been a move towards a new revisionist approach that aims to reflect Hindu religious life as it was experienced by non-literate, marginalized groups such as women, Śūdras and non-Sanskrit speakers. Wendy Doniger's recent book *The Hindus: An Alternative History* is one attempt to 'bring in more actors, and more stories, upon the stage, to show the presence of brilliant and creative thinkers entirely off the track beaten by Brahmin Sanskritists . . . and indeed, to show that . . . there were many different sorts of brahmins; many whispered into the ears of kings, but others were dirt poor and begged for their food every day' (Doniger, 2009, p. 2). In doing so she challenges traditional notions of Hinduism by describing Hindu cultures in which women, untouchables and animals were important creators of the culture, sexual desire and violent impulses were both of interest and of concern, and parts of society contained meat-eating and blood-sacrifice, as well as other practices considered antinomian in many contexts. Her work has opened a window onto under-studied aspects of Hindu culture, depicting a level of society that was as socially and psychologically complex, and as challenging to orthodoxy, as the milieus described in

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Ben Johnson's view of Elizabethan England, or the Arabia of *The Thousand and One Nights*. However, it is necessary to place such 'alternative' views in their revisionist context as a counterpoint to the elitist, sanitized picture of Hinduism that once prevailed, in order to avoid an unintentional reinforcement of older Orientalist portrayals of Indian culture as vulgar and primitive. Cumulative progress towards a balanced picture has become the overall goal of attempts to write a history of Hinduism.

Chronology and Periodization

There was little agreement on an overall chronology of South Asian Hindu cultures until relatively recently, and chronology remains subject to constant revision. A chronology requires a starting point against which subsequent history is measured, but in India as in most other cultures, there has been no epochal pan-subcontinental or pan-Hindu moment from which different groups could have charted a shared chronology of events.

Where any standard record of communal events was kept at all, it was largely communities or governments that kept their own calendar, recording only those events that interested them according to their own criteria. In many cases these were not recorded according to the year and date, but rather by noting which generation or government was current. As a result, knowledge of the successive governments of political history has been an important tool for reconstructing genealogies, and thereby piecing together a common chronology of events. Historians draw on local administrative or epigraphic records, archaeological evidence and genealogies that are often embedded in mythological narratives, as well as reference to datable events in literature. The chronological histories recorded by Buddhist, Chinese, Greek, Islamic and Portuguese and other European historians have been particularly important to the establishment of a chronology of Hindu culture in relation to the BCE/CE chronology that developed in Europe.

Equally important is the dating of texts in their relationships of mutual citation and redaction. In many cases Hindu texts have been dated in relation to Buddhist texts that in turn are dated in relation to Chinese historical records. The Hindu texts are then arranged into chronological order, largely through the analysis of their explicit reference or implicit use of existing texts. Subject to considerable variation and error, this has provided a chronological framework, but its provisional character is evidenced in the vague dating that is often given to key texts. The advantage of the textual method of dating is that it does not restrict the historian to study of a localized geo-political polity, but rather allows

for a much broader historical scope that is able to use citations or parallel passages in texts to trace intellectual history across India and even into South-East Asia, and across traditions, as Sanderson has done in his study of parallel passages in Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava and Buddhist Tantras (Sanderson, 2001). Such history is inexact, but shows the direction of cultural influences.

On the whole it is likely that the chronology of Hinduism will continue to resemble more a succession of cultural factors, rather than a date-specific reconstruction of events. It is perhaps for this reason that recent introductions to Hinduism have tended to give broad chronologies of particular strands of the tradition (e.g. dharma, Yoga and renunciation, narrative traditions, Viṣṇu, Śiva, goddess traditions), although good chronologies can be found in many introductions (e.g. Doniger, 2009, 693–4; Glucklich, 2008, pp. ix–xiii).

It has become popular to follow an approximate periodization of Hinduism while acknowledging that each phase overlapped significantly, and that some periods never came to an end. The 'periods' of Hinduism can be seen not as successive phases, but as additions to the culture that were retained at some level of Hindu society in a continual accretion that has led to the complexity of tradition today. The periods vary but tend (e.g. Flood, 1996; Michaels, 2004) to include:

a) **a prehistoric phase** about which little is known, but which is usually associated with the civilizations in and around the Indus valley, and a range of tribes in other areas.
b) **a Vedic phase** associated with brahminical power but also linked to the growing power of tribal chieftains/ kings.
c) **an ascetic or philosophical phase** marked by a period of urban expansion (leading towards the imminent aggregation of city-states into empires by the Mauryans), associated with the rise of ascetic renouncer traditions such as Buddhism, Jainism and the movements described in the Upaniṣads.
d) **an epic phase** focused on Hindu empires in the north and south of India, inspiring the confirmation of political authority and the integration of Vedic and renouncer religious movements found in epic texts such as the various regional versions of the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*. Royal patronage in this period inspired an increasing focus on particular deities and sects.
e) **a theistic phase** in which both political legitimation and popular interest encouraged the development of devotion to particular deities, described in the Purāṇas as incorporating formal structures of worship such as rituals, temples, pilgrimage centres and supporting mythological material. This continues with new impetus under the influence (both positive and negative) of Muslim colonialists in the early modern period, increasing in devotional fervour as expressed in bhakti poetry, philosophical

sophistication as expressed in the various Vedāntic treatises of theologians from Śaṅkara to Abhinavagupta, Mādhva and others, and sectarian affiliations as concretized in the many hagiographies of the period.

f) **a colonial phase** in which British government imposed new demands for the Hindu tradition to represent itself in comprehensive individual statements following the Western style, leading to the writings of nineteenth- and twentieth-century individuals ranging from Dayananda Saraswatī to Sri Aurobindo.
g) **a contemporary phase** marked by two opposing trends towards fundamentalist notions of Hinduism as a coherent nationalist identity in India, and syncretic renegotiation of Hindu tradition in diaspora or secular contexts.

Periods such as these are certainly helpful in martialling the millennia of traditions of the Indian subcontinent and its emigrants into a coherent story. They are also able to shed some light on the overall motivations behind certain religious developments. However they also use systematic bias to omit important elements that complicate this arrangement, including tribal cultures, Tantric traditions and village possession cults. It is important to recognize, following Michel Foucault's analysis of history, that periodization is a merely practical and provisional convention that is inevitably surpassed by the wealth of experiences to which it gives partial order. Quite a different periodization of Hinduism could be constructed in relation to the religious experiences of many tribes or villagers, or indeed of Hindus in regions such as Nepal, Thailand and Sri Lanka.

Social and Political History

Social and political history has provided an important framework for understanding the course of Indian history through which the threads of Hindu culture have run. Political history can shed light on issues of propaganda and patronage that affected major religious developments and when juxtaposed with social histories it offers a framework for understanding the conditions under which people lived in each period. This is essential for reconstructing the experiences of Hindus, for correctly interpreting texts, and analysing the meaning and motivations behind 'Hindu' ideas. Political history itself has undergone important shifts, revising the assumption based on the European model that the larger and more stable the political polity, the more its culture will flourish. Scholars such as Burton Stein have taken a revisionary approach to Indian history, suggesting that smaller or segmentary states are also able to nurture cultural activity while encouraging a localized diversity that would otherwise be suppressed by the pan-regional cultures of empire (Stein, 1980).

The findings of historians of Hinduism are, however, fraught with immediate political implications. The story of Hinduism as the only authentic Indian religion, preserving the same fundamental teachings throughout history, has been a fervent tenet of some sections of Hindu society and politics. It can be seen as a reaction to the debilitating effects of colonialization by both European and Islamic governments. However it has led to conflict between those attached to this monolithic view of Hindu culture and scholars who have sought to acknowledge the full diversity of Hinduism's religious traditions and the complexity of its history. Wendy O'Doniger's studies of attitudes to gender and sexuality have attracted controversy, as have scholars who have supported the thesis that the Aryans were Ancient Near Eastern migrants into India. The archaeology of contested religious sites has been extremely volatile.

Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad notes that the source of conflict in these cases is primarily cultural, rather than religious, as it revolves around issues of identity politics rather than 'a commitment to certain doctrines of transcendence' (Ram-Prasad in Flood, 2003, p. 527). It has led writers on both sides to address underlying differences in the epistemology – assumptions about facts and evidence – that is used to provide a foundation for historical theory. Social constructivist perspectives have gained notoriety by arguing that cultural relativism extends to the kinds of evidence that are valid for establishing 'facts' and Meera Nanda has rejoined such claims in a debate that has come to pit strategies for the 'recovery of self under colonialism' by affirming local cultural values (Ashis Nandi, 1983) against liberals who oppose the Hindu political establishment's sophistical strategies for affirming their own independence from nominally Western standards of truth (Nanda, 2004). Certainly, the debate has questioned the idea that academic research addresses sheer 'facts' that are fundamentally secular and non-ideological in nature. Whatever the outcome, the issue as a whole has been a reminder of the importance of 'history' narratives as a powerful force in contemporary society.

Hinduism and Political History: Kingship and the Mystery of *Greater Magadha*

In his influential 1985 book, *The Inner Conflict of Tradition*, J. C. Heesterman drew on both Weberian approaches and structuralist analysis of religious ideology to explain Vedic religion as a system designed to preserve the social balance between kingship and religious legitimation, which in turn contributed to the stability of society itself (Heesterman, 1985). His

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thesis demonstrated a way in which political motivations could be intimately woven into religious ideas, through cultural processes set in motion by the subtle evolution of stable societies, rather than the blunt propaganda of a ruling class. This study, like Richard Gombrich's Weberian study of early Buddhism, opened the flood-gates to fresh scholarly detective-work on the inter-relation of politics and religion.

Many intersections of Hindu religion and political power have since come to light. Alexis Sanderson has illuminated the way in which, in sharp contrast to the Vedic king-brahmin alliance that is explored by Heesterman, Tantra became allied with royal courts as the standard source of officiants in state ritual, spreading throughout South-East Asia as an ideology that united strands of ritual, ascetic and political power in a striking combination (Sanderson, 2009). Looking to a later period, John Stratton Hawley's *The Bhakti Movement: Excavations in a Master Narrative* (forthcoming), explores the ways in which patronage of local saints, sects, temples and even specific divine images, helped to fuel the flourishing of regional movements that would later be written in the hagiographies by their heirs into a 'bhakti movement' portrayed as sweeping through India in response to non-Hindu (Islamic and Buddhist) forces. The search for political ideologies in Hindu ideas, and vice-versa, has become a standard tool for exploring the way in which Colonial governments impacted on religion, demonstrated by Lipner's study of Bengali 'Hindu' responses to cultural imperialism (e.g. Lipner, 2005). These and other studies have demonstrated that political history cannot be seen as external to religious development.

Johannes Bronkhorst's meticulous detective work with regard to one particular kingdom, Greater Magadha, has prompted fresh attention to the significance of political polities as intrinsically interwoven with social structure, mobility and transmission and intellectual culture (Bronkhorst, 2007). In this extensive study, Bronkhorst uses many familiar textual sources to write the history of the culture that formed early Hinduism's main 'Other'. He claims that the non-Hindu kingdom of Greater Magadha presented the main point of contrast to Vedic culture, nurturing the atheistic ideas that were at the roots of Buddhism and Jainism, and developing new concepts such as karma and rebirth that would only gradually and reluctantly be introduced into the brahminical ideology of contemporary Hinduism. In many ways the study fills out Knut Jacobsen and Ninian Smart's suggestion that the key features of Hinduism as we

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know it, are an offshoot of Buddhism, rather than vice-versa (Jacobsen and Smart, 2006).

Although there is a danger that the 'Greater Magadha' thesis will be used as a holy grail that can solve all of the mysteries of the origin of Hindu beliefs (rebirth, karma, the need to recognize the truth of the self), and practices (meditation, asceticism), Bronkhorst provides a very detailed body of evidence supporting his claims in an effort to avoid this. His book is not only a helpful puzzle-piece illuminating one of Hinduism's most important formative periods, it is also a striking exercise in the methodology of doing 'alternative history'; he uses many Hindu sources to reveal features of non-Hindu traditions.

Indigenous History and Historiography

There has long been a battle over the question of whether Indian culture possessed its own methods for charting the events of the past, and its own tradition of doing so – an indigenous approach to history. Colonialists were shocked to find that there was no ready historical record available, and saw this as a sign that Hindus lacked basic forms of historical identity and self-reflective understanding. Other recognized that myth played this role (in India as in most other cultures), but saw the unsupported speculations as evidence that India's culture was more primitive in its epistemology. The debate has inspired a range of apologetic works that aim to recover indigenous ways of conceiving time, memory and the past itself (e.g. Sharma, 2004; Singh, 2003).

In fact, Hindu ways of conceiving of, and remembering the past do not vary greatly from those of other cultures. They draw on methods for keeping time over the longer term such as astronomy and community memory as formulated generationally in genealogies, and on the narrativization of the past in myth and literature. Fact, in the Indian approach to history, functions as the basis of narratives that formulate the significance of the past to later history-writing communities. This is not unusual insofar as every history selects elements from subjective memories to create a single story of a more complex past. The historical self-imagination is as important as the facts of the past for understanding the meanings and motivations behind Hindu ideas.

Thus Hindu literature has provided the main forms of historical awareness. Its narratives rarely aim to present complete accounts of the past, nor to represent that past as seamlessly continuous with the present. Rather the accounts in epics, purāṇas, kāvya literary compositions, and other texts tend to be episodic snapshots of important stories or moments from the past. Thus the *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata* and other epics such as the *Epic of Pabuji* tell of lives or family sagas

that are intended to share a communal identity with later audiences, but their immediate relevance is seen as more thematic than causal. It is not uncommon for historical material to be narrated by a figure with supernatural status or power, with the rationale that it is only through the vantage point afforded by such abilities that anyone could command the wide knowledge required for what Western scholars recognize as 'history'. The sage Vyāsa uses his capacity for supernatural vision to 'see' the histories recounted in the epics, and in a poetic travelogue from seventeenth-century Tamil Nadu it is two *Gandharvas*, or spirits, who describe the events and culture of the time, obtaining the requisite overview of the region by literally flying across the landscape from temple to temple (Rao et al., 1992).

Accounts in the Purāṇas and epics gave cosmic history its own distinctive temporal structure, conceiving of time as structured by a telescoping framework of epochs called *yugas*. These *yugas*, or phases of the history of the universe, span vast periods of thousands and millions of years, and also have intrinsic values affixed to them so that human history (after the battle at Kuruksetra described in the *Mahābhārata*) stands in a phase of overall corruption known as the *kali-yuga*, the darkest phase of history. Where the Western conception of cosmic time was premised on a linear, eschatological model, Hindu notions tend to favour a cyclical model, although the events that take place within each cycle do *not* occur cyclically; contrary to Nietzsche's influential idea that India believes in an 'eternal return' of the same events, history or *time itself*, does *not* repeat itself in the Hindu view as the events in each world-cycle are subject to individual decision-making as well as the effect of *karma*.

In the pervasive presence of astronomy in everyday Hindu life, there was a strong sense of calendrical time. Astronomy had been formalized into a Vedic science (*Vedāṅga*), and is still maintained today in the close attention to astrological analysis of auspicious and inauspicious times that governs the dates of important Hindu life rituals such as weddings. But this was not generally connected to the events of social or political life in a way that connected individuals and communities into a larger story – rather astronomical time functioned on the very small scale of personal experience, and the very large scale of cosmic history. At the individual level, astrology was mapped onto an individual's personal experience through *saṃskāras*, life rituals. The belief in *saṃsāra* or rebirth also impacts on the individual sense of history. Each individual can also see his or her own actions as emplaced within a narrative of progress through multiple lives. This provides a form of history that is both wholly private, yet extends beyond the limits of the present life and identity. In some Hindu cultures it is possible to find out about one's personal 'pre-life' history, adding a sense of background and teleology to the present identity, and rooting it in the events of the past.

Moving from the cosmic scale of Hindu myth to the everyday level of social discourse, human lives in the past were frequently measured against genealogical lists, whether of fathers and sons, or in religious traditions of gurus and disciples (*paramparās*). In the cases of certain genealogical lines thought to be derived from Manu, a Noah-like flood-surviving progenitor, there is an even stronger link between human and divine and cosmic histories. The narrative of Manu in the Purāṇas ties contemporary Hindus into the story of Manu's ancestors dividing into a 'solar' line through a son, and a 'lunar' line through a daughter. These ancestries were claimed by various actual kings, and are reflected in the royal affiliations of the protagonists of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*. Indeed, the main motivation to have one's life remembered against a large-scale framework of communal time came largely from political leaders such as tribal chiefs, kings and emperors, or from the religious leaders of schools or sects.

Anthropological Approaches to Hinduism

One of the major developments in the contemporary study of Hinduism is the realization that the past predominance of selective Sanskrit textual study has led to a prejudiced view of Hindu culture, and needs to be balanced by new data on the non-textual, praxis-oriented and oral, contemporary as well as ancient, not-exclusively-brahminical and not-exclusively-Sanskritic modes of Hindu life. This has prompted scholars to adopt anthropological methods for complementing our picture of textual Hinduism with a view of 'lived Hinduism', existing in the actions of actual people within the culture. This requires that scholars learn key skills: they have had to develop ethnographic methods for observing religion in practice. They learn how to record what they see in a reasonably accurate and objective way. They may also decide to analyse these actions, which are so much more transient and difficult to access than texts which are neatly preserved in libraries, and they must learn which of a range of analytic frameworks (e.g. structuralist, socio-economic, in relation to the body, or to the psyche) to apply for the 'best' understanding of what they observe. Last but by no means least, they must turn these many-layers of data into a single piece of anthropological writing that will convey something new to the reader without betraying the original religious situation, and the subtle meanings embedded in it. And the interdisciplinary dimension adds further challenges; when relating their findings to the Hinduism of texts, for instance, they have had to deal with the subtle interplay between texts and rituals, concepts and practices, the ideal and real levels of the culture.

Many scholars have taken up this challenge, entering the field in Indian, Nepali and diasporic Hindu societies to study a range of Hindu contexts, from

pilgrimage centres to temple life, festivals and renouncer traditions, and the usually hidden experiences of Hinduism in the home and in the village. Anthropologists have encouraged the study of dimensions of Indian society that had been previously neglected, including lifestyle, social structure, recreation, creative output in both 'arts' and 'crafts', nutrition and health, and intellectual technologies. The list of specific areas for study that promise to shed light on Hindu culture as a whole continues to grow, encompassing contexts of quotidian practice, migration and transition.

The main methodologies involve either starting with the first-hand accounts through *observation* by a scholar who has to some degree become a participant or 'insider' in the situation under observation, and *informant interviewing* on the other, collecting first-hand testimonies from the Hindu practitioners, which are then edited into an ethnographic account. This ethnographic account can then be used to generate or confirm broader theories about the patterns, meanings and motivations behind religious behaviour. Anthropologists typically require a range of interdisciplinary skills to put their object of study into historical context, interact in the appropriate language and idioms and identify meaningful elements of the situation for attention. This direct observational research has become the cornerstone of modern approaches to Hinduism, both in correcting limited views of the past and in building a fuller picture of the present.

While such methods seem to be specific to the modern practice of anthropology as it has developed in the last century, the study of Hinduism through direct observation has a long history. Some see the eleventh-century Persian writer Al-Biruni, who lived in India and generally recorded what he saw with an objective tone, even when it conflicted with his own religion, as the first participant – observer of Hindu culture. Colonial attempts at objective and detailed descriptions were made by institutions such as the Asiatic Society in Bengal at least from 1784. Initially, anthropologists of Hinduism tended to focus on features that seemed to exemplify wider religious trends, such as the pronounced social hierarchy of *jāti* and caste identities with its endogamous rules of marriage, and the formalized, highly regulated ideology of purity and pollution.

Some studies looked to methodological trends that were prevalent in the related disciplines of anthropology and sociology, and applied them to the Indian context with considerable success. In his 1966 *Homo Hierarchicus,* a study of the four *varṇas* or 'castes', Louis Dumont applied both methods of structuralist analysis that had been adapted from linguistics to the study of society and the Marxist sociological perspective on class tensions, to explain the *varṇa* hierarchy. Although his work was limited by its predominantly textual basis and remains too theoretical for some tastes – drawing on Rousseau and Tocqueville – nevertheless, it introduced a new way of imputing *meaning* to

Hindu social structures that had too often been seen as *de facto* traditions, perpetuated with little underlying rationale.

This trend for using India as a case study for broader issues has continued; *hijras*, men who dress as women and have developed a social identity and role all their own, help to illuminate unforeseen nuances in the social construction of gender (Nanda, 1998). The ways in which Hindu diaspora communities maintain links with India throws new light on broader categories of nation and trans-nationalism (Jain, 2010). New methods for the social construction of the body itself are revealed in attention to Indian body art (Shukla, 2007). The study of Hinduism has helped to illuminate many broader characteristics of religion.

Anthropological Perspectives on Popular Hinduism

One of the most important ways in which anthropological methods have impacted on the study of Hinduism, is through their unique access to parts of the culture – 'popular' current lived practices – that are not accessible through the study of any documents, such as festivals and practices of worship that are based on custom rather than on texts. Diana Eck's study of the city of Banaras (modern Varanasi), with its sacred geography, multiple religious communities and practices, unique symbolism and distinctive social life, showed how vivid and complete a picture of popular religious culture can be drawn when the scholar ventures into the field equipped with the appropriate observational skills (Eck, 1993).

Popular Hinduism: *The Camphor Flame* and Its Successors

In 1985 C. J. Fuller decided to tackle the 'philosophical bias' in the study of Hinduism by creating an introduction based on the increasing resource of anthropological writings that had accumulated since the seventies. His goal was to draw attention to 'the beliefs and practices that constitute the living, "practical" religion of ordinary Hindus' (Fuller, 1992, p. 4), and in doing so he marshalled a large quantity of anthropological data from different places and social strata into a summary that emphasized a range of revisionist themes.

Fuller used anthropological research to support a shift away from 'textual Hinduism', the 'philosophical religion' set out and elaborated in the sacred texts that were the principal subject matter for Indologists, Sanskritists, historians of religion and other textual scholars towards a

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more representative picture of 'popular theistic Hinduism . . . focused on the multiplicity of deities with whom Hindus interact and communicate in ritual' (Fuller, 1992, pp. 5–6). In his later anthropologically oriented introduction to Hinduism, Axel Michaels focused on the ritual mechanisms by which everyday life is sacralized in Hindu life, from rites of passage, to customs preserving ritual purity, engagement with auspicious sites and times and also rituals that encapsulate the ideologies of divine descent and kingship. His, he claims, is the Hinduism 'that is traditional but still practised . . . [and seen] at the village, and only minimally at the city' (Michaels, 2004, p. xiii).

In Fuller's Hinduism, popular devotion to deities is even more richly complex and pervasive than suggested in texts, which usually centre on a particular deity or sect; by contrast popular polytheism is so prolific as to present some manifestation of the divine in relation to every aspect of life and every locale. Temple worship in the form of *pūjā* forms the basis of the relationship between the devotee and the deity, acting as a widespread ritual that is far more important to most Hindu lives than the complex Vedic rituals which received so much scholarly attention in the past. Blood sacrifice has remained a potent expression of pure and impure, historically Vedic and Tantric binary relations within village life. In contrast to the orientation towards liberation or proximity to the deity found in so many classical texts, popular Hinduism devotes considerable energies to avoiding misfortune caused by proximity to inauspicious places, times, forces such as ghosts and demons and even deities whose destructive wrath is as pertinent a concern as their beneficial blessings.

One of the major shifts in exploring 'popular' and 'village' traditions, is the refocusing of conceptions of divinity away from the monotheism or familial pantheons that are more familiar from the theologies of the major devotional sects, towards an unwritten Hinduism thickly populated with beings of many kinds, both more and less powerful, more and less benevolent, than those of the Purāṇic *bhakti* tradition. 'Small' deities worshiped by relatively small communities are now being brought to scholarly attention as important case studies in the context-sensitive particularism for which Hindu theism allows. Reflecting the diverse reality of Hindu life, there are, for instance, deities for women in childbirth, deities representing particular places and deities representing regional identities.

Pilgrimages and festivals are also particularly important at the popular level, and are distinguished by the way in which such festivals creatively incorporate different elements to arrive at a festive cycle that is

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appropriate to the context. In each case, different myths, places, practices and customs are woven together. Festival foods adapt to regional cuisine. And there is a far stronger sense that at the local level Hindus feel more empowered to cultivate religious forms appropriate to their own lives than the brahmin-centric studies of the past might suggest.

Finally, in the revised version of *The Camphor Flame,* Fuller noted that all of these ground-level religious forms are increasingly being viewed by their practitioners through the veil of Hindu nationalist ideology – he comments that it is important not only to look at the messages it conveys, but also at the ways and degree in which it affects the life of Hindus across India. This has manifested largely in new yardsticks for evaluation of popular religious culture, as more and less 'Hindu', more and less 'Vedic' as opposed to the syncretic and tribal culture that has also always been woven through the texture of village life. Although certain aspects of Fuller's analysis have had to be revised with the continuing accumulation of anthropological literature, *The Camphor Flame* stands as a fascinating survey of lived Hinduism, and an important counterbalance to the classical picture.

Methodological Issues in the Anthropology of Hinduism

Anthropological methods open new windows onto Hindu culture, but they also entail new difficulties. Practically, the interviewer must identify the right community of people to speak to in order to illuminate the particular issues he or she is addressing, and must then get in touch with an adequate number of individuals, who are sufficiently representative of the desired group, and sufficiently articulate for the researcher to produce a set of data large and/or detailed enough for him or her to draw to wider conclusions. This may mean learning vernacular languages, or employing a translator, and it often means a journey. Many scholars of Hinduism have written on their experiences of learning and negotiating indigenous languages, in the course of lengthy apprenticeships to a traditional Indian scholar or on long quests for particular material. Miller describes how her project of translating the *Gītagovinda* took her into anthropological territory as she 'heard and recorded the songs of the poem in different musical versions in Orissa, Bengal, Bihar, Madras, Mysore, and Kerala, as well as Nepal' in an effort to fully absorb the idioms of the text in all its recensions, both oral and written (Miller, 1984, p. x).

Perhaps most difficult is the process of making the interviewer comfortable enough for him or her to give honest information. There is always a likelihood

that the conversation will be affected by the interviewee's reaction to the interviewer as someone from another culture, region or class, and this reaction can affect the way the interviewee represents his or her tradition. Once the interview is done, the researcher has to develop a keen ear for the idioms of the language and the psychological tone of the account in order to sort through the material. The many levels at which the research is necessarily selective in its sample, or subject to the anthropologist's interpretation and academic representation, have led anthropologists to question the degree to which such research should ever be treated as an objective source of truths about religious traditions.

Participant observation aims to overcome the distance created by cultural difference: the outsider seeks to elide that difference by becoming an insider as far as possible, and writing from a vantage point within the religious community. This may mean going on pilgrimage, becoming part of a temple community, joining a specialist group and living as they do, and learning to 'chat' at a level of familiarity that can mitigate scholarly distance by finding out what people say to each other when the 'academic' has gone away.

It is unclear to what degree the scholar, a European academic for instance, can really become an 'insider' in such communities, and whether his or her impressions are really analogous to those of the practitioners for whom this is not an exercise, but a way of life. Most anthropologists acknowledge that their access to insider truth remains limited. Nevertheless the old 'orientalist' image of the gentleman scholar dressed in indigenous costumes is giving way to a modern paradigm of academics who live with, are married to or *are* participants in the cultures being studied.

Nevertheless this 'insider – outsider' problem means that there can be a pervasive methodological bias in anthropological study. To some extent the very act of studying a culture transforms it, and sets up prejudicial relations between the scholar and his or her object. One of the criticisms of anthropological method in relation to the study of Hinduism is that anthropologists are often drawn to extremes and eccentricities within a culture, from possession to asceticism and brahminical traditions, potentially leading to an over-emphasis on the exceptions rather than the norms of Hindu life. As Michaels notes in relation to the role of women in Hinduism, 'Often, in scholarly literature or in journalism, they are noticed only when there is something spectacular: a virgin who is worshipped as a goddess; a maiden who is married off in childhood; a widow who allows herself to be or is immolated' (Michaels, 2004, p. 125). Site-specific, long-term ethnographies, such as Eck's study of Banaras and Dennis Hudson's study of the Vaikuntha-perumal temple, are useful correctives to this trend, offering a broader picture of society within which variations can be located (Eck, 1993; Hudson, 2008).

Anthropological Perspectives on Texts: Frits Staal on Vedic Ritual

One of the ways in which anthropology has proved its value to more traditional Indological scholars is by complementing our understanding of texts. It is still possible to visit Nambudiri brahmins who memorize the Vedas using the same methods as those used by their ancestors up to three thousand years ago, or to take initiation from ascetics who live perambulatory lives following templates that are outlined in early Sanskrit texts. There are temples that have retained the images and rituals of worship that were set up by the saint, or *ācārya*, by whom they were founded. Such cases shed light on the context of texts that have been studied in isolation for more than a century.

In 1975 a group of Indologists went to Kerala to observe a rare and ancient event: the performance of a Vedic Agnicayana ritual by Nambudiri Brahmins. Dutch Indologist Frits Staal, photographer Adelaide de Menil and other observers succeeded in documenting, filming and photographing the whole process of ritual preparation and enactment. The result was twenty hours of footage which was edited into a short film called *Altar of Fire*, and a two-volume written account entitled *Agni – the Vedic Ritual of the Fire Altar.* The study has now become a standard fixture on reading lists for Vedic Hinduism, unequivocally demonstrating that anthropological observation had much to offer the discipline. But it was also a challenging contribution to Hindu studies because it demonstrated both the importance of anthropological observation, and the difficulties of interpreting what the scholar sees.

The Nambudiri Brahmins are a community with a very strong tradition of father-to-son religious education. In watching the ways in which the ritual instructions were passed down through the generations, Staal found that the transmission of the instructions often included no explanation, nor even any verbal communication at all. In some cases texts were learned as abstract syllabic combinations. This raised a fundamental question about academic attempts to understand the Vedic rituals by seeking meaning in the texts describing them. For, whatever the texts said, in the lives of the ritual agents, these rituals had been acquired and experienced without any linguistic content at all. This meant that interpretations focused on the 'meaning' of the actions failed to recognize the non-propositional way in which the participants enacted the ritual.

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Staal's next book was a challenge to approaches to Hinduism, and even to notions of what religion itself is about. It has encouraged scholars to reconsider the kind of significance that religion can have in the lives of its practitioners. Building on Staal's study of the 1975 ritual, *Ritual and Mantras: Rules without Meaning* was wide-ranging in its multi-disciplinary analysis of the Vedic ritual tradition, drawing on the theories of anthropologists Victor Turner, Stanley Tambiah, Gananath Obeyesekere and Clifford Geertz; the semantic theories of Ludwig Wittgenstein, Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Noam Chomsky, and the sociological analysis of Michel Foucault. He used these many interpretive touchstones to suggest that ritual is a form of cultural expression that contains syntax – rules, but not semantics – meaning. He went on to suggest that this typifies a type of religion in which actions are seen as both 'useless and pure'. He suggested that a ritual's accretion of particular meanings is contingent on the historical context and is a secondary, inessential part of the ritual itself.

In many ways an extension of structuralist approaches which had long been popular in anthropology to the analysis of Hindu ritual, Staal's book has been highly influential, and sometimes controversial. In seeking to derive general conclusions from the Vedic material, Staal puts himself in danger of making 'Orientalist' over-generalizations, as when he claims that, in contrast to the West's notion of progress, 'Many Oriental systems . . . stress repetition, transmigration, or reincarnation, numerous worlds and world periods' (Staal, 1989, p. 448). Others, as Staal himself notes, have criticized him for focusing on rituals that are really the province of a minority (brahmins) and are connected with the preservation of their identity, rather than the popular rituals that are done with reference to Tantric, purāṇic and narrative texts (see Burkert, 1987, p. 233).

Archaeological Approaches to Hinduism

Archaeological study of Hinduism looks at physical traces of its past culture, both prior and parallel to the historical period for which there is textual evidence. It uses specific artefacts to reconstruct historical events, and also analyses them as general indicators of lifestyle. This may involve study of the physical environment, such as settlements, agrarian landscapes, ritual sites. Alternatively it may analyse evidence of migration, mercantile travel and pilgrimage to reveal cultural transmission and influences within the diverse society that included the Hindu traditions. It may also involve the study of material culture,

including shrines and temples, and such objects as coins, pottery and tools. Archaeologists may work above ground with found objects or excavate for buried evidence, and their attention can be focused on a range of human experiences from settlement, agriculture and architecture, to migration or maritime culture.

From its roots in antiquarianism, archaeology has evolved as a specialist discipline requiring both historical knowledge and skills in surveyance, excavation and various kinds of analysis of materials. Methodologically, twentieth-century archaeology moved towards an increasingly particularistic approach to history, rejecting the tendency towards grand-scale speculation, in favour of an approach that sought to ground its theories in the close analysis of particular items of evidence. Modern archaeologists seek to contextualize particular sites within the wider cultural geography of a region, and the survey of wide-scale settlements has been crucial for improved understanding of early Indian cultures. Like anthropology, modern archaeological techniques have helped to counterbalance the textual record of Hindu history. Championing archaeology's ability to reveal the lived dimension of everyday religious life, Schopen wrote that if the study of religion had focused on archaeological remains rather than texts, 'it would have been preoccupied *not* with what small, literate almost exclusively male and certainly atypical professionalized subgroups wrote, but rather, with what religious people of all segments of a given community actually did and how they lived' (Schopen, 1987, p. 193).

Ancient sites were known and reused as residences for centuries, but with the classicists of the Raj, a new phase of interest began, transferring methods developed in other places to study in India and surrounding countries such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal, Burma, Sri Lanka and Thailand, where many important sites are located. Colonial interest in ancient Indian culture was formalized in the establishment of the Asiatic Society by William Jones in 1784, and the Archaeological Survey of India was established in 1861 as a recognition of the now enthusiastic and systematic approach to ancient Indian remains.

Just as Western classical archaeology gained a formative impetus through Heinrich Schliemann's search for the city of Troy, Indian archaeology became a popular discipline largely through the study of the cluster of settlements in what is now modern Pakistan, known as the Indus Valley civilization. From the first exploration of the major Indus sites by Sir John Marshall at Harappa and R. D. Banerjee at Mohenjo-daro in the 1920s, to the more recent discovery of a cultural continuity with the Indus civilization at settlements in Gujarat, the foothills of the Himalayas, Baluchistan and the Middle East, the study of the Indus civilization laid the foundation of archaeological engagement with India.

With Willliam Jones' interest in Sanskritic culture as only one part of the Indo-European complex, the study of ancient India had been allied with the

search for trans-national ancient cultural developments. But in the wake of these first grand-scale studies, aimed at identifying the rise and fall of civilizations on the model of Greece, Rome, the Nile civilization, Troy, Carthage, and so forth, archaeology entered a new phase of 'bottom-up' study focused on micro-scale studies of small communities that aim to show economy, trade, migration and cultural influence.

Certain themes have predominated in the archaeological study of Hinduism; the study of locations of worship explores a range of religious place-types from shrines to temples, and occasionally positing a morphology that links this range in connection with changing styles of Hindu worship. Early figures and aniconic objects found at or near collections of stones which could be 'altars', have raised questions as to whether these could be the first shrines housing images of the gods or sacred objects. Identifiable shrines focused on what appear to be liṅgam stones and fertility goddesses are found from the first centuries BCE (Ray, 2010, pp. 2–3). Vedic rituals by contrast were largely mobile and left few remains. We have little knowledge about the processes by which shrines were overtaken by temples as the main religious 'sites'. Yet through their association with royal patronage, temples illuminate the dynamics of political power and legitimation, as successful dynasties funded temples that promoted their rule.

Archaeological study provides the foundation for a chronology of early Indian society on the basis of which to provide a historical context for the textual traditions. The study of the architecture and other material remains of settlements, and the inscriptions of key polities have formed an important framework for the history of Indian religious movements. Ethnoarchaeology, the study of contemporary societies thought to be analogous to earlier ones, is controversial because it posits similarities that may be difficult to confirm, and it often assumes an unilinear evolutionary model of all cultures as following a uniform process of development. Nevertheless it can be of particular interest in India, where there is a range of parallel cultures, separated by language, geography and beliefs, which appear to have changed at quite different rates. It can be tempting to look at certain communities, such as local tribal groups, or sectors of society such as ascetics and rural villages, as similar to those described in older texts and thus as relatively unchanged groups providing a window onto the past. But appearances can be misleading.

More recently the polemical implications of archaeological research have become clear through the politicization of archaeological findings. The search for Hindu temples at sites subsequently inhabited by Muslim residents or mosques has become particularly inflammatory. In these cases, archaeology has become allied to 'ancientism' the elevation of ancient origins as an indicator of cultural (and political) ownership of a place. The consequences can be devastating, and lives have been lost in the struggle of different factions to establish ancient connections that command ownership of a site or legitimate ideologies

(religious or political) that draw on claims to authenticity. Stratigraphy, the layering of subsequent settlements on the sites of earlier ones, can also raise controversial questions about land rights. Because archaeological excavations can effectively destroy a site, archaeologists have a distinctive ethical responsibility in making the information it yields accurately available.

Art Historical and Visual Approaches to Hinduism

Visual texts are a major feature of Hindu cultures, playing an essential role in a society, that like most, has communicated as much through image as script to the majority of the population. Ideas and messages could be conveyed through sculpture, reliefs and murals, architectural forms and even city-planning, and in more recent centuries, through painting, printing and film. These many forms of visual text thus offer a window onto non-literate society. They also have their own distinct means of communicating, from the mood created by the sacrosanct experiential space of the temple to the lively, public religiosity of devotional posters in a home or workplace.

The development of History of Indian Art as a discipline was a natural progression from the growth of Indian archaeology, as a great deal of sculpture, painting, architecture and craftwork brought to light by archaeologists required distinctively art-historical and aesthetic methods of interpretation. However early attempts to make sense of Indian arts using Western concepts were often disastrous, with critics swayed by a Christian distaste for concrete images that were likened to the 'idols' denigrated in the Bible, and for nudity or sexual depictions that were seen as immoral. European tastes had been formed by a history of exposure to sources that led them to prioritize the simplicity of line and apparent nobility of subject that they perceived in the Greek and Roman remains with which they were familiar (see Mitter, 1977). The aesthetic values of realism, formal simplicity, restrained colours, gentle curves and overall symmetry were praised. By contrast, Indian art often displayed the opposite characteristics of complexity, colour, rounded human forms and stylized features, according to distinctive Indian aesthetic tastes that are supported by their own underlying rationales. The Western art-historical field has only gradually begun to appreciate the aesthetics of Indian arts.

Purely decorative art has existed in India, particularly in fabrics, crafts and architecture, but as in many cultures, the sheer effort and cost involved in creating arts in stone or paint have meant that many of the plastic arts were related to religious or political purposes in some way. This does not mean that they should be understood as purely 'religious', but it does mean that a full comprehension of their significance requires knowledge of the religious context to which they allude. Advances in the hermeneutic understanding of Hindu arts

have come from scholars in a range of fields, explaining the ideologies behind the complexity and multiplicity of many Indian images (Srinivasan, 1997), the philosophy of divine embodiment and presence that renders certain images 'sacred' (Eck, 1981; Davis, 1997; Valpey, 2006), and the poetics of sacred space that governs the design of temples (Elgood, 1999, pp. 129–30). Devotional images, sacred objects and temple ornamentation can be 'read' as a text conveying 'visual theologies' (Eck, 1981, p. 41) that can have a sophisticated relation to specific sectarian ideas, while reaching a wide section of society in a way that crosses the boundaries by which linguistic expression is limited.

Learning to 'See' Hindu Deities: From Maligned Monsters to Divine Posters

For Western scholars the process of learning to see, describe, analyse and understand Hindu arts in a scholarly way has been slow as many arts refer us to 'notions of vision and visuality that are specific to South Asia' (Woodman Taylor in Ramaswamy, 2003, p. 297). Diana Eck has written of the study of Hindu visual arts that 'as teachers and students . . . we too must become "seers"' (Eck, 1981 p. 1).

Reflecting the need to reveal specifically 'Hindu' ways of seeing, a number of scholars have focused on *mūrtis*, or images of deities, as a characteristic form of Hindu art that is in need of a distinctively 'Hindu' hermeneutic key in order to be fully understood. *Mūrtis* are neither merely symbolic, nor are they mnemonic images meant to remind the worshipper of an idea or story. Whereas most figurative imagery in Christian culture is *representative* – it refers to a deity at a distance, by contrast Hindu deity images tend to be *presentative* – they make that deity present in a concrete form. Divinity becomes embodied in physical matter, descending to the same plane as the worshipper in a way that 'suggests the congealing of form and limit from that larger reality that has no form or limit' (Eck, 1981, p. 38). This gives the plastic arts a special status within Hinduism as a medium of the divine. It also impacts on the way in which the arts are experienced by practitioners. Since, properly understood, the *mūrti* is more like a person than a picture or statue, the aesthetic experience of it is less like seeing something, than like *meeting someone*. Richard Davis has also stressed the interactive dimension of the *mūrtis*, focusing on the 'Hindu theological postulate of religious images as animate beings' to show how such images become living members of the religious community, with biographies of

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their own (Davis, 1997, p. 7). It is this that makes the viewer's response to divine images so distinctive: meeting the gaze of the image involves locking eyes with god. For Indian scholars this may be a self-evident feature of much Indian figurative art, but for Western thinkers it can require a thorough-going change in approach. One Western devotee who began to worship Hindu images writes of his own attitude that:

> I, and others like me who have taken to deity worship, have become convinced that God can indeed be manifest to the senses in a concrete, tangible form. In doing so, we have had to overcome certain ideas about God bequeathed to us by our own Judeo-Christian heritage. These ideas make it difficult for most westerners to understand the divine image. (William H. Deadwyler in Waghorne et al., 1986, p. 73)

Like a person, an image can have such spiritual *charisma* that worshippers are affected by excitement, awe, authority and a sense of inspiration when in its presence (von Stietencron in Malinar et al., 2001). Yet the traditional manifestation of the divine as a particular concrete statue that can be bathed and clothed, housed and transported like a human is giving way in the modern Hindu home to printed posters – infinitely repeatable images that are inexpensive, accessible and privately owned, prompting scholars to think in new ways about the significance of such Hindu art. Christopher Pinney suggests that the arts should be viewed through a socio-economic lens: through its style the printed *mūrti* references 'the genre of picture-making' of which it is a part, with its own distinctive context of material industry, market forces and typical consumers (Pinney, 2004, pp. 31–2). Similarly Lutgendorf's study of depictions of the deity Hanumān shows religious authority and political clout being carted across the nation in the form of each Hanumān *mūrti* (Lutgendorf, 2007). In these cases the divine image functions in multiple ways: as a sign that denotes a particular being, as a symbol that evokes a range of associated ideas and as an icon that emplaces the viewer within a mythological world of stories that evoke certain ideas of history, morality, life-goals and lifestyle. But more than these, an image that has been ritually 'awoken' into divine embodiment has its own life, authority and personal charisma, imbuing it with a unique effect on the viewer.

The temple can also be seen as the 'theatre' that prepares the devotee for the meeting with the *mūrti*, focusing the viewer, and sensitizing him

(*Continued*)

or her to the imminent sensory experience of the divine. As Dennis Hudson puts it, the temple is 'meant to transform the consciousness of devout and learned viewers. It was designed and painted to seize their six senses of touch, taste, sight, hearing, smell, and thought, and then focus them on Deva or God who is the subject of every spoken word and material form' (Hudson, 2008, p. 6). Heather Elgood has also sought to emphasize this multi-sensory character that the arts of the temple and *mūrti* give to typical Hindu experiences of worship. She describes *pūjā* as possessing 'a sensory dimension [that] involves touch in the rubbing of oil or powder on the idol; smell in the offering of the incense; hearing and chanting in the participation of prayer, and sight and being seen through darśan and the offering of the sacred flame in the darkness of the interior shrine' (Elgood, 1999, p. 12).

Reminding us that context is as important for visual as for written texts, Kenneth Valpey, who explores approaches to Hindu visual arts in greater detail in his article in Chapter 4 of the present volume, points out that the use of images in the major traditions of Hindu worship has always been informed by a matrix of relevant literatures. The ritual actions that are performed before a *mūrti* may relate to Vedic traditions: mantras and symbolism may relate to Tantric traditions, the precise combination of such actions may depend on the particular Purāṇa to which the deity relates, as may the meaning of the image and the nature of its 'embodiment' in the eyes of the worshipper (Valpey, 2006). Often, it is the emotional ethos created by devotional poetry, which may even be sung to the deity as a formal liturgy, that makes the deity 'come alive' in the experience of the devotee. The experiential dimension of visual arts in devotional traditions was prescribed in detail by a poetics of religious art expressed in the writings of the Śaiva thinker Abhinavagupta, Vaiṣṇava theologian Rūpa Gosvāmi and others. Further, this poetics is intrinsically interwoven with the emotional dynamics of stories told in Purāṇas, epics and hagiographical tales of the bhakti saints.

Images can also fill in details that go unrecorded in texts, or confirm ideas and literally show their place in practice. The detailed paintings typical of the north-west of India are a valuable clue to life at the courts of Rajput rulers: their detailed scenes of court life show a cast of characters that ranges from kings to brahmins, renouncers and *siddhis* engaged in extreme yogic practices, musicians and dancers, servants and courtiers. Linked as they are with the life of the deity they portray, Hindu images are an excellent subject for what Igor Kopytoff has called

'cultural biography' (Kopytoff, 1986), a form of study which charts the cultural significance of a work as it changes dynamically through different periods and parts of society. Philip Lutgendorf's study of ancient and modern depictions of Hanumān in literature and arts is one such biography – his opening chapter follows the competition for the largest Hanumān *mūrti* that gripped India from the seventies to the present day (Lutgendorf, 2007). His method offers an opportunity to see how a deity's significance can shift across Indian and international regions, in recent decades, and throughout the last two millennia.

Access to the visual record presents it own problems, and galleries have a special part to play in the presentation and mobility of visual texts. Excellent exhibitions with well-researched explanatory material and secondary literature have offered valuable access to the visual works. Recent exhibitions such as the 'Garden and Cosmos' exhibition displaying works illustrating Rajput court life from the Mehrangarh Museum Trust of Jodhpur and inspiring a publication with both prints and scholarly essays, and 'The Sensuous and the Sacred: Chola Bronzes from South India' exhibition organized by the Arthur M. Sackler gallery, which has been developed as an online exhibition offering background information on the material production of the bronze sculptures and the process of worship, have demonstrated ways in which visual sources can be made available as a valuable resource for study.

Philosophical and Theological Approaches

All of the previous approaches have methodologically stood outside of the traditions they examine, maintaining a 'phenomenological' distance from the material in the interest of an objective point of view. However there are two approaches that address the material from within, engaging with intellectual and religious traditions on their own terms in a shared project of reflection. These are the analytic-philosophical, and theological approaches undertaken by comparative philosophy and comparative theology respectively.

Philosophical Approaches

Indian intellectual culture has long contained traditions of systematic reflection on epistemological and metaphysical questions, and many historians study these traditions as important aspects of intellectual culture. Others, however, see these traditions as offering valuable contributions to our understanding of expressly *philosophical* questions. These scholars engage in at least three tasks in relation to Indian philosophical works: (a) they use philosophical analysis to interpret texts in terms of the logic and cogency of their arguments – this may

mean interpreting them in terms of Western analytical methods of philosophical analysis such as logical notation and reconstructing the arguments in new ways; (b) they treat them as sources of freshly illuminating arguments and apply their distinctive approaches to existing unresolved issues; (c) they explore the ways in which the material may offer alternative approaches to the broader concerns of what philosophy is, does, and takes as its foundational assumptions. As Arnold puts it, 'in reconstructing Candrakirti's arguments as transcendental arguments, it is reasonable to hope that we might learn something not only about Candrakirti's Mādhyamaka but also about the logic of transcendental arguments more generally' (Arnold, 2005, p. 7).

As discussed in Chapter 3, 'History of Hindu Studies', this project of cross-cultural philosophy is actually one of the first ways in which Western culture engaged with Indian texts – in collaborative dialogue with a parallel philosophical tradition. Issues such as the nature of personal identity, of the perceived world, of inference, deduction and logic and the nature of language are addressed by both traditions. B. K. Matilal was a pivotal figure in the modern history of Indian philosophy, training himself across disciplines to become the bridge between the Indological, analytic-philosophical and traditional Indian philosophical disciplines by studying with Indian scholars to become a *tarkatīrṭha*, a master of dialectical reasoning, then pursuing a doctorate in Sanskrit at Harvard, and simultaneously studying mathematical logic with W. V. O. Quine. This laid the solid foundation for the analytic examination of Indian philosophers through his prolific writing while at the University of Toronto, and in the Spalding Chair at Oxford. Matilal's lead was followed by a handful of prolific philosophers with a foot in each camp, and J. N. Mohanty criticized those who were reluctant to study Indian philosophy *philosophically,* as perpetuating Orientalist prejudices that presumed the Indian tradition to be dogmatic and irrational (Mohanty in Bilimoria et al., 1997, pp. 4–8). Others have championed cross-cultural philosophy as an eye-opening discipline that demands philosophers be willing 'to have one's initial sense of relevant concepts revised by what one learns' (Arnold, 2005, p. 7).

As in other cultures, most Indian thinkers in the past drew upon previous texts as a resource for reflection, developing new ideas from authoritative sources. India's tradition of philosophical debate was a highly formalized part of the culture, 'systematic and methodical' and 'bristling with controversy and criticism' probably from the time of the Buddha onwards (Matilal, 1999, p. 2). This tradition of debate continued under Islamic rule, but the entry of Indian thinkers into Western systems of academic study began to introduce a new synthesis, yielding Indian philosophers who saw themselves as uniting Indian and Western methods of philosophical analysis in a practice of logical assessment and theory-construction that exists in both the Indian and Western philosophical traditions.

Nevertheless, it is necessary for the scholar to be thoroughly accustomed to the cultural context of each tradition. Jonardon Ganeri has corrected the assumption that philosophical truths transcend cultural relativism, by reminding us that reflection in the Indian tradition may include techniques that go beyond dialectical and deductive argument; instead such texts assume that:

> . . . the cure for our misconceptions is never simply to *announce* the right view . . . they find subtle strategies and indirect methods to help the reader undercut their false sense of self, techniques of graded instruction, embedded and contextualised description, literary devices of disguise and deceit, the use of figures and characterisations . . . to delve into the 'pupil's inner world'. (Ganeri, 2007, p. 2)

Thus this discipline cannot simply consist of a Western study *of* Hindu and associated cultures, but rather it must be a mixed Western and Indian methodology, used for shared goals. There are now journals and courses that feature comparative philosophical consideration of both Indian and Western material, and the Society of Asian and Comparative Philosophy convenes sections at the annual meetings of the American Philosophical Association, the American Academy of Religion and the Association of Asian Studies. Nevertheless, the discipline of cross-cultural philosophy remains small in relation to the volume of current philosophical work that draws solely on European and American sources.

Hindu Theological Approaches

While Hinduism has been seen as a tradition that was highly prolific in its past production of theological texts, little rational theology – the critical, evidence-grounded, systematic rational study and development of beliefs – has been done in the academic world in the last half-decade. When placed in the context of other contemporary religious traditions, this is odd: Christians have continued to engage in theological reflection aided by textual exegesis, philosophical analysis and critical discussion and Islam and Judaism also have scholarly traditions. The problem is not one of different religious histories, as Hinduism is famous for its vast traditions of philosophical theology, from the Mīmāṃsā scriptural exegetes, to the subtle metaphysical debates of Vallabha and the later Vedāntic schools. Rather the obstacles seem to relate to attitudes to Hindu religiosity, and to the future of confessional study in academia as a whole.

Hindu cultures contain the necessary ingredients for a developed theological tradition, drawing on logical methods of reflection and holding itself up to rational critique. The logical methodology and epistemological standards

established by Nyāya writers, combined with metaphysical models produced in the classical and early-modern periods, provide a foundation for philosophical theology. Past theologians saw it as their task to develop systematic accounts of ultimate reality, metaphysics, the soul, perception and soteriology, and it was assumed that such accounts much be consistent internally and with regard to the sources that they deemed to be authoritative, and that they must be able to defend themselves from philosophical critique in formal debates that were open to the scrutiny of all comers.

However, the entry of Hinduism into the global arena as seen in the oratory and writings of key figures such as Vivekananda and Gandhi, couched philosophical thought primarily in rhetorical terms. Accessible expositions and appeals to intuitive values were instrumental in establishing Hinduism as a religion that was known and of interest to a global audience. The tradition of debate seems to have declined naturally as Hindu rhetorical expression flourished.

It is possible that there is little demand for Hindu theologians; the general tendency to see Hinduism in terms of practice rather than propositional beliefs would suggest that there is little need for a critical insider-exploration of Hindu religious ideas. Nevertheless there are examples of Hindu scholars who use their academic training both to study and to develop their own tradition. Anantanand Rambachan has examined the history of Advaitic attitudes to authoritative texts to develop a distinctively 'Hindu' theological understanding of scripture as an epistemological source (Rambachan, 1991, 2006), while Ravi Gupta has explored the methods used by a foundational theologian in his own tradition to combine different Purāṇic and Vedāntic, narrative and reflective outlooks into a single coherent theistic Hindu perspective (Gupta, 2007). Others suggest that theological methods can be shared and exchanged between traditions, and Francis Clooney has written of the ways in which specifically Hindu approaches to scriptural hermeneutics and to deity have helped him to develop his own Catholic theological reflection (Clooney, 1993, 2001, 2008).

Thus a discipline of Hindu theology might include not only the standard Western modes of inquiry into natural theology, epistemology and scriptural hermeneutics, but also perhaps other more distinctively Hindu ways of engaging critically with the contents of Hindu religious reflection. It is important, however, to clarify the difference between this movement and the theological discourse of the Hindu 'Right'. Hindu theological reflection in this context aims at rational theology in the sense that it earnestly engages with and holds itself responsible to the results of critical research into history, texts and testimonies. Writers such as Clooney (1993, 2001, 2008), Neville (2001) and Ochs (2005) have sought to exemplify conscientious concision in their comparisons, and a precise and limited scope in their conclusions. The project of a Hindu engagement in

comparative theology would need to follow a similar path in order to avoid the many methodological pitfalls of propaganda and generalization that lurk by the wayside. Parimal Patil has suggested that there are few Hindu scholars adequately trained in both religious expression and academic method available to take up the gauntlet (Patil in Clooney, 2001). This may, with the continued growth of the field, alter in the foreseeable future.

Interdisciplinary Approaches to Hinduism

In his attempt to capture the full range of ways in which the popular deity Hanumān has been interpreted, Philip Lutgendorf noted that:

> . . . religious studies scholarship of the postcolonial era has increasingly used phenomenological and ethnographic approaches or has favoured an interdisciplinary 'toolbox' method combining firsthand observation (when feasible) with all available textual, historical and iconographic sources; moreover it has increasingly turned to vernacular and folk sources and has sought out the voices of neglected and disenfranchised groups . . . (Lutgendorf, 2007, p. 11)

In the last twenty years interdisciplinary work has become increasingly common as scholars are realizing the ways in which text, practice, locations, arts and performance, are all connected. Many aspects of religious culture cannot be fully understood without taking into account a range of sources: rituals are often performed and adapted with reference to a range of source texts. Texts, on the other hand, rarely tell the whole history and can even obscure the true reception of ideas within a religious community.

It is becoming increasing clear that interdisciplinary approaches are essential, but this necessity is placing new demands on scholars to master a variety of skills or to work in a collaborative way. *Altar of Fire*, the 1975 film of the Nambudiri brahmin enactment of the Agnicayana ritual required not only a philologist (Frits Staal) but also a photographer, a cameraman, a fund-raiser (approximately $90,000 was raised from academic sources to help fund the ritual itself) and a Harvard professor (Robert Gardner) who was also an acclaimed documentary director (see Schechner, 1985 for a description and discussion of the making of *Altar of Fire*). In a range of areas, anthropologists and textual scholars are becoming interchangeable, as in the study of Tantric, bhakti or ascetic practices. The Early Śaiva Mythology project at the Centre for Tantric Studies in Pondicherry takes into account textual, epigraphic, art-historical, archaeological and numismatic materials. In many cases such blending of techniques has facilitated a significant leap forward in the understanding of texts or ideas that had once seemed impenetrable.

Places of Pilgrimage: *Cities of Light*

After a year studying as Banaras Hindu University, Diana Eck devoted time over the next fifteen years to studying the city of Varanasi (Banaras) from a range of different perspectives in order to produce a multi-faceted portrait.

> *My work is based on two primary sources: a voluminous literature of Sanskrit texts which describe and praise Banāras, and the city itself, with its patterns of temples, its seasons of pilgrimage, and its priestly and lay interpreters. It is a study of 'text and context,' or perhaps more accurately, of classical Sanskrit texts and the 'text' of the city, brought together so that we may see this city and understand its sacred structure and meaning as it has been seen by Hindus*. (Eck, 1993, pp. xiii–xiv)

On the textual side of her research, she looks at *māhātmya* literature praising the city, mythological literature telling of the city's origins and its theological significance in relation to Śiva, the presiding deity, and the ritual literature giving instructions to pilgrims and priests. Her study of the city combines study of its geography 'its ancient streams and pools, its temples and ruins, its lanes and pilgrimage routes anthropological side' (Eck, 1993, p. 14) with art history and archaeology, and anthropological research through interviews with informants and direct observation. Her study deftly tells the complex story of a city in which religious concerns have become the support for trade, society, administration, architecture and art, over a long and dynamic period of historical development.

Her study inspired further studies of Banaras (e.g. Freitag, 1989), and many studies of other important pilgrimage sites, each of which offers a new conjunction of deities and theology, with texts, arts, political patronage, ritual tradition, social context and historical contingency.

As Biardeau puts it, 'One cannot hope to make a system of Hindu culture as a whole, without any remainder' (Biardeau, 1989, p. 3). The overall goal, in all approaches to the study of Hinduism, must be to add to a picture which will represent Hindu life in its complex, ever-changing totality to a greater and greater degree. The goal of accurate understanding and appropriate interaction must remain provisional upon the rich life of the tradition itself.

Notes

1. This comment was made by M. Winternitz in pleading for a critical edition to the international community of scholars who met Xith International Congress of Orientalists in 1897 (cited in *The Mahābhārata*, Vishnu Sukthankar ed. (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute), i).
2. See Patrick Olivelle's contextualization of the Upaniṣads, his correlation of the Manavadharma-śāstra with historical reconstruction of the society it seeks to regulate, and also his study of the history of early temples in legal literature ('The Temple in Sanskrit Legal Literature' in *Archaeology and Text: The Temple in South Asia,* Himanshu Prabha Ray ed. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010).
3. See John D. Smith's article *'Worlds Apart: Orality, Literacy, and the Rajasthani Folk-Mahābhārata'* in *Oral Literacy,* 5/1 (1990): 3–19 for a detailed and comparative discussion of the dynamics of oral culture in societies that have low literacy rates.
4. See the 'Extended Sanskrit Grammar' project led by Jean-Luc Chevillard (CNRS, Paris), Vincenzo Vergiani (Cambridge) and Emilie Aussant (Paris).

6 Regional Perspectives: Local Traditions

Chapter Outline

The diverse regions of the Indian subcontinent have developed distinct forms of Hinduism, each shaped by its respective landscapes and literatures, its history of trade, immigration and pilgrimage routes, its tribal and clan customs, patterns of local rule and participation in imperial power. As a result, South-Asian Hindu traditions span considerable cultural differences that manifest both as axiomatic oppositions in belief, and also as subtle variations on a theme. In almost all of the states described below, Hindus routinely follow Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, Śākta, Advaitic and other traditions that resemble each other despite their wide geographical spread. Rajasthani visitors to a Sri Lankan temple will be more or less familiar with its layout, practices and even many of the texts used; pilgrimages, empires, textual traditions transmitted through educational systems and wandering bards and modern print and visual media have ensured this continuity. In addition, each region has felt the influence of renunciatory sects, Tantric schools and lineages of philosophers, which formed a familiar presence in each community, practising and preaching around temples, in the

forests and mountains or at the local courts. Yet alongside these pan-Indian features of religious life, it is the regional variations that, taken together, make up the variegated texture of Hinduism as a whole.

To take one festival as an example, Divālī, from the Sanskrit *Dīpāvali*, meaning row of lights, is most commonly seen as a celebration of the victory of King Rāma, an *avatāra* of the god Viṣṇu, over the demon King Rāvaṇa. But in different regions the celebration itself changes duration, emphasizes different days, tells different stories and adds localized features. In Orissa, Bengal and Assam the locally popular goddess Kālī is often the main focus of celebrations which accordingly focus on the goddess-oriented *Lakṣmī-pūjā* day of the festival, while in Maharashtra children remember the Maharashtran king and hero, Shivaji. In parts of Tamil Nadu and Goa the main focus is not the struggle of Rāma with Rāvaṇa the demon king of Sri Lanka, but that of Sambhava, a consort of Kṛṣṇa, with Naraka the demon king of Assam. In some regions lamps are lit, in others firecrackers, and in diaspora countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, Fiji, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Divālī has become an official holiday and an occasion for cultural education and reinforcement of Hindu identity. The range of variation does not end there for Divālī is not exclusively a 'Hindu' festival; in Jainism it is celebrated with reference to the liberation of Mahāvīra, and in Sikhism Divālī commemorates Guru Har Gobind's liberation of imprisoned Hindu kings.

The *Rāmāyaṇa* demonstrates a particularly pronounced sense of Indian cultures as framed within kingdoms that are geographically arrayed across a large terrain reaching from Ayodhya, the land of Rāma in Uttar Pradesh, to Sri Lanka far to the south and beyond the shores of peninsular India. The Purāṇas, many of which focus upon particular locations, go beyond this narrative use of geography to prescribe programmes of pilgrimage to the key settings of popular stories. By encouraging people to experience the landscape in the context of religious goals, pilgrimage practices elevated the mere terrain and its changing communities into an idealized 'religious landscape' as imagined by Hindu texts. William Sax has suggested that notions of the Indian subcontinental area as a unified religious landscape coincided with the development of ideologies of empire; the goal of 'conquering the four directions' (*dig-vijaya*) was adapted from the imperial rhetoric of unification through conquest, to express the goals of pilgrimage as unification through religious participation (Sax, 2000). This impulse to unite the regions is part of what Flood calls the Hindu cultural 'imaginaire'. Such practices continue to have a unifying function, particularly as many pilgrimages allow for the relaxing of social rules that would divide communities 'at home'. Purāṇic accounts in particular demonstrate a 'need to acknowledge, and if possible, integrate regional specificities' into a single all-encompassing religious map that can be *enacted* by their listeners through pilgrimage (Kunal Chakrabarti in Chamapakalakshmi and Gopal, 2004, p. 77).

Yet pilgrimage-based conceptions of Hinduism also separate cultures by attributing to them distinct qualities that are characterized in contrast to each other. The epics, for instance, depict an India in which the eastern coast was full of 'demonic' tribal chieftains, while the Gangetic plain and the Punjab hosted advanced civilizations filled with urban cultures and governed by divine avatāras such as Rāma, Kṛṣṇa and the Pāṇḍavas. Many modern Indians think of the Himalayan regions as the ideological 'north' of Hinduism – a land of renunciation and spiritual achievement, while Tamil Nadu appears as the homeland of indigenous Hinduism, providing an authentic touchstone for a culture which later becomes affected by colonial, Indo-Aryan and tribal influences in the north. For devotees of Kṛṣṇa, the region of Braj is the heartland of Hindu devotional experience, acquiring a special status as a part of Kṛṣṇa's heaven. For other pilgrims Gomukh, the source of the Ganges river, is the point at which the sacred enters the world in its most powerful and tangible form, while Varanasi, the city on the Ganges where pilgrims go to die, and have their ashes scattered, is the sacred centre of India, providing the most powerful *tīrṭha*, or crossing to the eternal realm. Many Hindus would have seen a wide range of places and practices in their pilgrimages; an itinerary attributed to Śaṅkaradeva, the sixteenth-century Assamese Vaiṣṇava theologian, describes a pilgrimage that ranges from Badrinath in the Himalayas, through Vṛndāvana, Nepal, Karnataka, Gujarat and the South Indian states (Neog, 2004, pp. 217–24).

The study of regional Hinduism is a vast undertaking even within the scope of a single village or city; to discuss each region in full is the task of a longer book. The following surveys aim to give a flavour of the religious trends and ethos that have dominated in the different regions in the Indian subcontinent. A more comprehensive discussion would include the history of Hinduism in the area that is now Pakistan, in Thailand and South-East Asian cultures and in the vast diaspora in Africa, Europe, the Caribbean and America. Discussion of the patterns of diasporic Hinduism can be found in the relevant section of the Chapter 7, on 'Future Directions: Issues and Debates.

The Northwest: Rajasthan, Gujarat and the Punjab

As India's desert region and largest state, joining long-standing trade routes between the Middle East and central, eastern and South-East Asia, with Gujarati access to the Arabian ocean, **Rajasthan** has nevertheless maintained a highly distinctive cultural identity. It draws on the culture and arts of Rajput kingship on the one hand, and the harsh but craft-rich life of desert shepherds and camel-traders on the other. Encompassing such extremes of class and economic status, it is not surprising that hierarchical caste structures play a strong role in Rajasthani society. Yet folk-culture and the communalism of Kṛṣṇa-*bhakti*

also found an enthusiastic audience here, as manifested in the life and poetry of Rajasthan's own bhakti saint, the unmarried female poet, Mirabai, who is said to have sung of her devotion to Kṛṣṇa with those she met in the streets around the palace of Chittorgarh, depite her own high-caste and unchaperoned status.

Rajasthan is one of the 'Indus civilisation' states, with outposts of the ancient urban centres such as Kalibangan scattered throughout the region. It endured waves of rule by a number of groups, including the Indo-Scythian tribes who fled Chinese invaders downwards from Central Asia into north-western India. A range of subsequent tribal rulers rose to increasing power, culminating in the establishment of the Rajput dynasties who arose in the eighth century to eventually build fortress cities such as that at Chittorgarh, housing sophisticated royal courts, and helping to develop Rajasthan's folk arts into a coherent and flourishing regional culture. The **Rajput heritage** remains powerfully present in the styles, stories and architecture of the region. Further, the Rajput claims to ancestral links with the solar (*sūrya*), lunar (*candra or soma*) and fire (*agni*) dynasties has remained a source of Rajasthani identity and pride. *Jātis* which would not normally be associated with kingship, such as the influential trader castes of the region, still assume Rajput ancestry (Babb, 1999), and today many *jātis* claim membership of the subdivisions of the divine lineages, so that the ideology of divine kingship has come to permeate the culture at large. One result is that lineage and caste hierarchy are a powerful feature of Rajasthani society, manifesting in well-defined rules for social interaction, such as physical proximity to others, communal eating and other forms of public interaction. Interestingly, given the Vedic attributions of the Rajput lines, Rajput lineage is not always seen to be intrinsically Hindu – a large segment of those who classify themselves as Rajputs today are Muslim and Sikh.

The need for protection against invaders led the Rajasthani courts to develop a martial culture in a grand style that was meant to fit their divine lineage. Some of India's grandest fortresses were built in Udaipur, Jaipur, Jodhpur, Jaisalmer and Chittorgarh, and decorated in a style that emphasized the cultural finesse of the rulers. The Rajputs epitomized the model of Kṣatriyas as both great warriors, and patrons of the arts. Their strikingly successful struggle for self-rule caused them, like Shivaji of Maharashtra, to be seen as defenders of an indigenously Hindu India against Muslim and British foreign invaders. Regional lore includes many tales of Rajput warriors who fought bravely against hopeless odds, and Rajput wives who equalled their husbands in courage by choosing death rather than capture at the hands of their opponents. The courts became the centre for a number of groups of **warrior–ascetics**, militant monks who combined the physical discipline and power cultivated by yogic and Tantric renouncers, with the social status of the military. In Jaipur the army included regiments of Dādūpanthī, Rādhāvallabhīya, Nimbārka and occasional Rāmānandī nāgās who combined 'a dual identity of bhakti and militancy',

seeing themselves as defending the state with their swords, and its religious well-being with their scriptures (Monika Thiel-Horstmann in Eck and Mallinson, 1991, p. 256). However the Rajputs were equally adept in diplomacy, negotiating effective alliances with both Muslim rulers such as Akbar, and with the British Raj, enabling many of them to maintain Rajasthani self-rule and relative cultural independence from colonial influence. Indeed, two of the Mughal emperors, Shah Jahan and Jahangir, had Rajput mothers.

However one consequence of the prominence of caste ideologies in Rajasthani culture is a strong sense that female members of higher-caste families must be closely veiled, guarded and often kept in seclusion from the world outside their own courtyard and even from male members of their own families (see Minturn et al., 1996, for a detailed account of the lives of Rajput women in Uttar Pradesh). The situation varies according to caste, however – lower-caste rural women often have greater mobility and prominence in the public sphere. Bhakti traditions made an important impact here, as in Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat, leading to a particularly strong tradition of reverence to Kṛṣṇa that is reflected in series of paintings of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, such as those currently displayed in the museum of Jaipur palace. **Mirabai**, the Rajput female poet–saint who is said to have escaped her restrictive marriage and seclusion to devote herself exclusively to worship of Kṛṣṇa, is the exemplar of this devotional tradition, and her songs continue to be widely sung in Rajasthan. The character of Mirabai, recognized and revered across India, has provided a valuable opportunity for scholars to observe the way in which religious, and in this case bhakti-related figures who challenge the standard religious roles, can provide women with models for actual social change; women can sometimes achieve a degree of independence and freedom to refuse familial and marital control by claiming that they are like Mirabai – inspired by devotion to Kṛṣṇa.

But unlike Mirabai, the vast majority of Rajasthanis live pastoral lives in desert environments inhabited by villagers cultivating crops such as cottons and oils, and in the more arid areas, camel or goat-herding tribes. **Folk arts and traditions** – of song and music, decorative crafts, plays and stories and festivals – remain an important part of the culture and reflect the customary beliefs of the majority of Rajasthani people, expressing their own lives and concerns. Traditionally trained bards sing tales of local gods, heroes and holy men in pastoral desert settings that are familiar to the audience, while some tales often include reference not only to gods but to the ghosts and spirits of the desert. Other arts complement the literary heritage: the poems of local saints are sung according to traditions that use distinctive Rajasthani musical forms and instruments, and other narratives of local life are re-told through elaborate traditional *kathputli* puppet-shows. The epic of Pabuji tells the tale not of the divine *avatāra* Kṛṣṇa, but of a wily cattle-rustler who is worshipped as divine, yet to whom the audience can relate. Rajasthani versions of the *Mahābhārata* replace the gambling matches

of the original with a popular Rajasthani children's tree-climbing game of 'catch'. The characteristic humour and irony of Rajasthani narrative themes (Smith, 1990) lend a very distinct local character to the figures, themes and ethical perspectives of Rajasthani texts. John Smith writes compellingly of being in the non-Sanskritic, non-literate 'other world' of Rajasthani religion, in which the avatāras of turtle, fish and man-lion may appear, but the name of Viṣṇu is unknown.

There is a significant degree of cultural continuity between Rajasthan and its southern neighbour, **Gujarat**. Indus civilization settlements existed throughout Rajasthan, Gujarat and Punjab and Haryana, and both Gujarat and Rajasthan have hosted Iranian Zoroastrian refugees (Gujarat and Mumbai house India's major Parsi and Irani communities), and a thriving Jain community that has made a decisive contribution to the regions, visually attested by elaborate Jain temple complexes across the region. Gujarati trade was centred around its long coast on the Arabian Sea facing west towards Africa and Europe. This sea-access – the nearest to the Gangetic plain empires – made it an important region in terms of travel and international encounter. Through a history of early tribes, such as the Gurjars who gave the state its name, of dynasties such as the Solankis providing patronage for the building of palaces and temples, to a Mughal presence, and the international engagement forced upon it by its western seaboard position, Gujarat has developed a distinctive religious culture that is highly influential in the African, European and North American diasporas. It is a region that is well integrated into the North Indian Sanskrit religious culture, as evidenced by the inclusion of Gujarat's holy river, the Narmada, in the sacred geography of the epics and Purāṇas, and the usual range of Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava and Śākta deities in its temples. Yet it has also developed its own distinctive local traditions, many of which centre on holy men who provided Gujaratis with personal, bhakti-oriented points of local access to the sacred.

While Lākulīśa, the ca. third-century CE founder of the Pāśupata Śaiva school, is said to have been born in Gujarat, the region has a particularly strong tradition of Vaiṣṇava worship, reflected in the association of **popular Gujarati saints** such as the eighteenth-century Swaminarayan, and the nineteenth-century Jalaram Bapa, with Viṣṇu and Rāma, respectively. The former figure, who developed a highly institutionalized form of renunciation among his followers (modelled perhaps on Jain monasteries and prompted by colonial concerns with discipline and social mores), has inspired branches that now reach around the world. There was also a significant Muslim and particularly a Sufi presence in Gujarat, reflected in the syncretic Hindu-Muslim 'Sant' theology of the sixteenth-century poet Dadu Dayal. While its religious history features saints from a wide range of social backgrounds, Gujarati culture includes a traditional strand which upholds strong adherence to a 'pure' Hindu lifestyle, following dietary rules determined according to Hindu and Jain vegetarian principles, as well as Sāṃkhya prescriptions for 'pure' food and lifestyle. An emphasis on monastic discipline and

traditional notions of pure lifestyle is duly seen in the life and writings of perhaps the most famous Gujarati, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi.

The region known as **Punjab and Haryana** is one of the wealthiest areas of India, capturing moisture from the Himalayas, which feeds the fertile plains and provides a firm agricultural base. Historically, the region's varied religious culture has been built up through subsequent patterns of invasion or migration by Central Asian, Persian, Greek and Muslim (Turkish, Arab, Afghan, etc.) peoples. For a brief period in the fourth century BCE, the area was part of the empire of Alexander the Great, and was subsequently incorporated into the Mauryan and Greek and Central Asian (Scythian) empires before becoming one of the first areas to fall under the sway of Muslim rulers arriving from the north and west. The region thus lies at the intersection of Sufi and the Uttar Pradesh – based Vaiṣṇava bhakti traditions. This heritage inspired the distinctive cultural synthesis that is found in the ethos of the **northern 'Sants'** – poet–saints of varied backgrounds who embraced a transcendent, monotheistic concept of the divine, while advocating a radical equality between castes and genders. The cultural mix of this gateway region inspired Guru Nānak in the fifteenth century to develop a tradition that would ignore the divisions of religious affiliation and endogamous social hierarchy, encouraging people of all classes to unite in affirmation of a transcendent but malleable *panentheistic* ultimate reality that could incorporate all religious forms. This was the philosophy that would become the basis of Sikhism, which is today the largest religion in the Punjab, while the Hindu-majority areas have been collected under the administrative district of Haryana.

Reflecting the cosmopolitan character of the area, Banda Singh Bahadur tried in 1713 to establish the Punjab as a multi-cultural state, with little success. Nevertheless the region has been seen by many as the homeland of Vedic Hinduism and the location of Kurukshetra, the great battle in which the *Mahābhārata* culminates. Later, having managed to hold off British rule longer than many of its neighbours, the Punjab was divided by the British at partition, and significant culturally 'Punjabi' areas are now located in Pakistan. The region's earlier capital at Lahore was replaced in the Indian half of the territory by India's first planned city, Chandigarh. Some twentieth-century Sikh groups, who had hoped for a further division in 1947 to create an independent Sikh state, have been engaged in long-standing relations of opposition with the Indian government, which led in 1984 to the assassination of Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and subsequent anti-Sikh rioting. Despite this unrest, the arts have flourished, developing traditions of Punjabi poetry and story-telling, the bhangra music form which has become internationally popular, and a festive tradition renowned through the country. The Sikh aesthetic pervades the area of the Punjab, and Amritsar forms a cultural touchstone for the region, welcoming visitors from all religions. The region's international character has taken a new

form in the considerable Punjabi diaspora, much of which retains ties with its families 'back home'.

The Western Himalayas: Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Kashmir, Jammu and Nepal

The Himalayas are important in Hinduism both as a geographical and a cultural entity. On one hand, they function as a symbolic realm that evokes images of spiritual discipline and ascetic renunciation associated with Śiva and his consort Pārvatī, much as the region of Braj provides the physical and aesthetic setting for devotional tales of Kṛṣṇa. Mount Kailash, believed to be the home of Śiva, is a major pilgrimage centre for the devout and also forms the northernmost reach of Hindu sacred geography, while the fact that the Ganges originates in the area only serves to confirm the intrinsic purity and power of the Himalayas. Yet in geographical reality, the Himalayas have historically acted, as mountains often do, as a region in which tribal traditions were preserved from much of the politics of the empires that shaped the plains states further south. As such, like the regions further east, they are full of communities which follow their own traditions in worshipping nature spirits, or adopt an assimilative strategy in worshipping localized versions of characters from the Sanskritic pantheon.

The belief that it is possible for individuals to have direct access to spirits, ancestors and deities through **possession and mediumship** has been widespread in the region. The role of the medium, oracle or bard developed in a highly institutionalized way in Himalayan societies, mediating divine blessing to the community, and acting as a source of legitimacy (or even competition) to the king (Lecomte-Tilouine, 2009a). Such traditions of mediumship and possession may have also contributed to the vibrant and multi-faceted Tantric traditions that thrived in the area, to which an elaborate 'magical' ritualism, committed yogic practices, sophisticated and creative philosophical schools and ideologies of gendered divinity and practice contributed over time. Such Tantric Hindu traditions have had a subtle interplay both with the Vajrayana Buddhism of Buddhist traditions centred in Tibet and fed by Chinese pilgrims, and with the tribal religions and their spirits and nature deities. However, many of the indigenous tribes have remained marginal to popular culture, expressing their liminality in relation to the North Indian mainstream through the choice of ambivalent epic characters such as Karṇa, or antagonists such as Duryodhana, as the major focus of worship.

Himachal Pradesh is a largely Hindu state with a strong Śākta tradition manifested in goddess temples and shrines throughout the landscapes, and relatively few minority religions. Yet the Sino-Tibetan languages and the

communities of Buddhist refugees and indigenous tribes add a distinctive character that is reminiscent of Nepali and Tibetan culture. It is one of the Himalayan regions that is most accessible to the south, bordering the regions of the Rajput kings and reachable from the administrative centres of Uttar Pradesh. Indeed, its local kingdoms were occasionally assimilated into the major empires, but most kingdoms and tribes maintained relative autonomy, paying suzerainty to rulers such as the Mughals, or the local Gorkha tribe who came to power in the late eighteenth century. Later the British government established a colonial settlement at its summer retreat at Shimla, leaving a legacy of private schools and colleges which have established that town as an educational centre. But the village Hinduism of the surrounding area has traditionally focused on local temples to local gods, linked to Śaiva, Śākta or Vaiṣṇava traditions.

The hills are full of **Śākta sites** both large and small, and the associated mythology blends the Purāṇic myths of Śakti, Satī, Durgā, Kālī, Tārā, Pārvatī who is said to be the daughter of the Himalayas, and other goddesses. A number of *śakti pīṭhas*, the sites where Satī's body is said to have fallen when destroyed in an effort to restrain Śiva's mourning for her, are located in Himachal Pradesh. The site where her tongue fell at Jwalamukhi highlights her relation to the mountain landscape and its caves, while the temple at Chintpurni depicts the goddess as the self-beheading recipient of blood sacrifices, Chinnamāstikadevī. Smaller shrines with simple and sometimes anonymous goddess figures can be found scattered throughout the landscape, indicating a general cultural engagement with female divinity, centred less on the ethos of village threat and protection, than on the energies of nature and their manifestation within the Himalayan landscapes.

The Himalayan states are also the main centre for worship of Śiva as the ascetic and antinomian cave-dwelling *sādhu*. Many temples and pilgrimage traditions in **Uttarakhand** are famed for their relation to Śiva, with the Ganges, which is associated with him in many origins myths, anchoring **Śaiva traditions** in the area. The Ganges flows from its point of origin at Gomukh through the upper valleys of Rishikesh to emerge as a full-scale river on the plains at Haridwar where Śiva is the presiding deity. Like the pilgrimage to Mount Kailash, the circuit of pilgrimages to Gangotri, Yamunotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath demands a journey through difficult landscapes that gives pilgrims a brief taste of the lifestyle of the sādhus who live in the region and are Śiva's full-time devotees. The temple at Badrinath also forms the northern cardinal point on the predominantly Vaiṣṇava pan-Indian Char Dham pilgrimage circuit, showing how the pilgrimage systems explicitly sought to integrate diverse centres of worship and the theologies associated with them. This tradition of popular worship followed many of the patterns characteristic of Bhakti traditions elsewhere, and devotional songs were written by Kashmiri Śaiva saints such as Utpaladeva to encourage loving submission to the deity, who was

meanwhile worshiped in quite different ways by the initiated elite with their Tantric and yogic disciplines (Bailey, 1987).

These Śaiva traditions existed in formalized schools of initiation, yogic discipline and theological speculation further north in **Kashmir**, a region associated with both the social normalization of intensively antinomian Tantric traditions, and the sophisticated philosophical refinement of Advaitic and Buddhist metaphysical debates. Attached to the passes and trade routes of Central Asia, Kashmir was incorporated into North Indian imperial culture by Aśoka Maurya, and is known as a Hindu kingdom in the *Mahābhārata*. Its scholars engaged with both the Advaitic Vedānta theology that was popular further south (a visit by Śaṅkara is narrated in hagiographic literature), and the Pratyabhijñā philosophies of the Tibetan Mahāyāna Buddhists. This intersection led to the development in the ninth century of *Trika* or **'Kashmir' Śaivism**, a school which drew on Śaiva Tantra, Yoga, Śākta goddess worship and philosophical Advaita to form a school that reflected the mixed constitution of the region's religious communities. Abhinavagupta, the polymathic Śaiva Advaitin and aesthetic philosopher who lived through the turn of the eleventh century, wrote works which were the epitome of this erudite synthesis, offering different paths and *upāyas* (a word used by Buddhist communities to express alternate disciplines) for achieving liberation, mediating the esoteric rituals of cremation ground ascetics who lived outside the mainstream of Śaiva society to a more widespread community of householders. Interestingly Abhinavagupta is said to have been 'born of a yoginī', suggesting that his parents were themselves well-established in Tantric practice: the domestic life and social strata of everyday Kashmiri householders incorporated Tantric families who manifested orthoprax Vedic practice externally, and followed Tantric teachings as a private religious practice (Sanderson, 1985, p. 205).

For the populace at large, the worship of forms of Śiva as *Netranātha*, or *Svachandrabhairava* offered ways to engage with the **Śaiva theism** of the Śaiva Siddhānta school, the 'impure' styles of worship of the Trika school, and the local concerns with protection from negative influences, all in a devotional package that was more convenient for most than the demanding disciplines aimed at those who were able to renounce social ties (Sanderson, 1995, pp. 22–3). Today the region is largely Muslim as a result of Muslim rule from the fourteenth century, and the majority of Hindus live in the attached area of **Jammu.** Buddhism continues in the isolated high-altitude region of **Ladakh**, as do many traditional tribal social customs such as fraternal polyandry, the tradition of brothers sharing a single wife within a combined family. Nevertheless the scholarly study of Kashmir Śaivism has thrived, kept alive both by Western scholars, and also by traditional pundits such as Swami Lakṣmaṇjoo.

Too often seen as a subsidiary culture to those of 'Buddhist' Tibet or 'Hindu' India, **Nepal** is in fact the world's only Hindu state, remaining largely

uninterrupted in its development by Muslim and European colonial influence. It has attracted attention from anthropologists such as David Gellner, Robert Levy, Steven Parrish, Marie-Lecomte-Tilouine, Sondra Hausner and others, as a place of contradictions: it is at once a Hindu state with ancient temples that preserve key theological traditions such as the Pāśupata Śaivas in a near-original form, and at the same time a culture which is highly influenced by East and South-East Asian Buddhist and Tantric traditions, with pagoda-shaped gopurams on some temples, and Śiva and Pārvatī statues that are practically indistinguishable in style from Tibetan Vajrayana images. It is idealized by many Indian Hindus as a bastion of authentic Hinduism, and at the same time it is seen by some as a 'lesser' Hindu state in which mountain tribes predominate, rather than, for instance, those groups who claim a direct lineage to Sanskritic or Tamil cultures. In fact, Nepali culture has its own 'Himalayan Hindu' identity, with distinctive music, cuisine, social customs and ritual styles, all contributing to a Hinduism that has lived in closer proximity to well-established Buddhist and tribal cultures than has that of many regions further south. Nepal is also distinguished by the fact that its monarchy was not compromised by colonial control, but has rather gone on to graduate to a full modern monarchical statehood, with all of the transformations and trials that this entails. Today it continues to seek new ways to allow each religious group, caste, clan, ethnic and geographical identity to co-exist in a modern polity (Dollfus, 2003).

The Eastern Himalayas: Manipur, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh

Having remained separate from the main currents of Hindu culture for most of the past, the Eastern Himalayas have a striking heritage that owes as much to the rest of South-East Asia as it does to India – demonstrating a cultural and political connection with their eastern neighbours that is reflected in the Indian government's 'Look East' policy. The north-eastern states are both relatively independent of 'Sanskritic' cultural trends through the centuries, and are also distinctively synthetic in relation to the cultures which meet at the eastern crossroads of the Himalayan mountains and the flood plains around the Bay of Bengal. Indigenous tribal religions, Tibetan Buddhism, Chinese religions, Hinduism and Bangladeshi Islam all play a part in their history, and rather than adjoining the main body of India, many of these regions border on countries such as Myanmar, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Tibet and China. Like Nepal and Tibet, they have occasionally been caught in the cultural power struggles between 'communist' China and Russia in the east, and 'capitalist' Europe and America in the west, highlighting India's own geographical position on a boundary between East and West. Thanks to these cross-currents, many have

become painfully aware that their culture needs to be preserved in a time when so many are suffering a gradual cultural dissolution in the face of media and migration.

Manipur is an example of a delicate balance between old and new, mainstream and marginalized Hindu traditions, all contributing to 'the composite nature of the Manipuri social matrix' (Brara, 1998, p. vii). The north-eastern territories that are attached to modern India have largely stayed independent of the Mauryan, Gupta, Islamic and other empires that linked the northern regions, and while they were added to the Indian rather than Bangladeshi polity at partition, they have maintained relative social independence from both, with only a small strip of land acting as a bridge to India. The region has Bangladeshi Muslim communities as well as a large number of Christian hill tribes evangelized by Baptist missionaries, and a large proportion of tribal communities, resulting in a diverse cultural blend united by the Manipuri language. Kingship has played an important role in mediating and maintaining Hindu identity in the area, and the **Manipuri Vaiṣṇava tradition** is closely associated with kings who promoted or were initiated into Vaiṣṇavism from the fifteenth century onwards. In the eighteenth century this Vaiṣṇava tradition came to focus more specifically on Caitanya Vaiṣṇava worship which still thrives there today, and is famous for the 'rasa līlā' celebration that has evolved from a combination of local dance forms and traditional images of Kṛṣṇa's dances with the gopīs in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. This is a characteristic example of the way in which mainstream Hindu traditions take a localized form in this region which is so distinct in language and ethnic make-up from areas to the west.

The tribes of Manipur, **Nagaland, Meghalaya** and **Mizoram** were heavily evangelized by the missionaries who flooded the region and leading to the current Christian majority in Mizoram among the linked Mizo hill tribes. Agricultural festivals featuring local dances, musical styles and foods flourish alongside the usual Christian holidays, while the strong local structure of village communities are gradually being altered by increasing identification with the Western cultures that are prominent through both church and media. Many of the region's religious communities straddle the line between Hinduism and what might be termed animistic reverence for indigenous deities, demonstrating how permeable the boundaries of Hinduism can be in states where tribal identities are strong and have not been strongly 'sanskritised'. Many of the deities worshiped appear to be unrelated to the Vedic and Purāṇic pantheons of classical Hindu gods, and in the 2001 census Hinduism was attributed to under half of the Manipuri population. **Tribal groups** in Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur and also the monarchy of Sikkim, have developed separatist movements seeking various forms of independence from centralized Indian rule. Meghalaya is particularly distinct in its tribal constitution, with local languages deriving from Austro-Asiatic rather than Tibeto-Burmese or Indo-Aryan families, and local

communities uniquely following a matrilineal structure. Yet interestingly, here there is a distinct Tantric influence on the forms of Hinduism that exist alongside or in combination with tribal animisms; Śiva and Durgā traditions of worship at established shrines can be found in many areas.

Nearby **Sikkim** has a smaller population than any other state with a majority deriving from Nepali backgrounds, combining Hinduism with the Vajrayana Buddhism that flourished in neighbouring Tibet. It was ruled by a Buddhist monarchy from 1642, but has remained subject to almost constant raids and bids for power by the Nepalese, Bhutanese, Chinese and eventually the British. After a period as a protectorate monarchy, it became integrated into the Indian polity as a state that was culturally closer to its immediate Buddhist neighbours than to the Hindu majorities of most other Indian states. The population of **Arunachal Pradesh** is largely of Tibetan/Burmese background, contributing to its contested political status in relation to India and Chinese-administered Tibet. Connections with Buddhism in the region takes the form of a well-established Tibetan-Buddhist community, the famed Buddhist Tawang monastery, and the sixth Dalai Lama, who was born in the north-western area of the state and whose poems are considered part of the local cultural heritage. There are relatively few Hindus – rather Hinduism exists as one of a range of available religious cultures that circulates through the community and the media. The majority of the population is animist, but in Arunachal as in most tribal states, they are often syncretic in their combination of elements of Hindu, Buddhist and/or Christian religion, celebrating a range of festivals or adding deities to their worship, as in the Donyi Polo religion which worships the sun and moon as the eyes of god, but complements indigenous expression of this belief with Vedic paradigms of reverence for sun and moon deities.

The Gangetic Valley: Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand

The Gangetic plain forms a natural corridor that has led successive migrating peoples, traders and armies between the Middle East in the west and China, South-East Asia and the Far East. With the Arabian Sea and ultimately the Mediterranean at one end of that natural corridor, and the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean at the other, linked by the Ganges and a network of other rivers, the territories of the Gangetic plain have provided a core administrative region for many of India's empires, and a natural conduit for cultural transmissions from East to West and vice-versa. As a result, these areas have been the heartland for key stages in the development of Hinduism: from the brahminical cultures of the writers and direct heirs of the Vedas, to the ascetic cultures of Buddhism, Jainism and the Upaniṣadic *yogis*, *ṛṣis* and sages, and the landscapes of Braj and Varanasi in which early modern bhakti flourished into the love and

liberation-oriented forms (respectively) that are so influential on modern Hindu belief. The Ganges herself, receiving tributary rivers such as the Yamuna, Gandak and Brahmaputra all the way along its length to the Bangladeshi delta, ensures that the area is rich with *tīrṭhas*, or sacred pilgrimage sites. The proliferation of pilgrimage, trade and administrative settlements has meant that the Gangetic plain, from the royal centres of the Rajputs in the west and the city of Ayodhya, which is identified by many with the ideal city of Rāma, to the grand culture of Magadha and other classical civilizations of the east is seen in Hindu culture as the region of great urban civilizations of learning and social justice. Many of those centres have sought to recapture that history in one way or another – in Ayodhya by building a temple where the past site of Rāma's city is thought to have been, and in Varanasi by establishing cultural institutions such as the Banaras Hindu University.

Uttar Pradesh is an extremely populous Indian state and the heartland of Hindi culture, encompassing sites that are important to a range of mainstream Hindu traditions. Its religious character is dominated by a string of religious sites such as Braj, the childhood home of Kṛṣṇa, the Ganges, on the banks of which lies Varanasi which is associated with Śiva and considered throughout the subcontinent to be one of India's most powerful crossings to liberation, or *tīrṭhas*, Ayodhya which has strong associations with the god Rāma, and the m*elas* of the region, where pilgrims both acquire grace and come into contact with extensive communities of ascetics who gather *en masse* to create temporary ascetic 'cities' at astronomically auspicious gatherings at the confluence of sacred rivers.

In the west, the area of **Braj**, which encompasses Mathura, Vrindavan, Govardhan hill and a stretch of the Yāmuna, is richly described in a range of literatures recounting Kṛṣṇa's youth. In the sixteenth century, Vaiṣṇava Vedāntic thinkers such as Vallabha, and the Gosvāmis, who had been sent up the Ganges to revive the landscape of Kṛṣṇa's youth by the ecstatic Bengali saint Caitanya, helped to re-establish the area as a religious centre by building and consecrating temples at key sites. Within a generation the success of the reinvigoration project would receive direct patronage, in the form of land-grants from local rulers and the Emperor Akbar himself. Like Śrīraṅgam in the south, the region was also crucial in combining devotional bhakti with the rational schools of logic (pīṭha), and metaphysics (vedānta and samkhya) which had emerged from the Vedic culture and continued to develop in universities and courts. Major Vaiṣṇava theological thinkers made their home here, making it a home to the Puṣṭimārg *sampradāya* which follows the theology of Vallaba, and the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava *sampradāya,* following the inspiration of Caitanya Mahaprabhu and his disciples, the family of Gosvāmis. As Kashmir became a centre of Śaiva intellectual philosophy, so these thinkers established the region as a northern centre for Vedāntic Vaiṣṇava thought, often debating and writing from their devotional settings in or near key temples.

Today, pilgrims to Mathura, Kṛṣṇa's birthplace, Gokul, the village in which he was raised by his foster parents and Vrindavan, the forest region where he courted his consort, Rādhā, can visit the settings of his life as narrated in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and subsequent devotional texts. Certain nearby sites in this geography of Kṛṣṇa-devotion are specifically of interest to devotees of Rādhā. They can walk through her childhood neighbourhood at Barsana and visit relics of her experiences with Kṛṣṇa, such as the Radha-kund lake, a water-hole said to have been created by Rādhā and her companions. As a pilgrimage centre, the region is an exemplary example of a religious landscape in which Hindus not only hear divine stories or worship their protagonists, but can actually enjoy a sense of participation in those divine lives (Haberman, 1994, p. 8). To pilgrims who are familiar with the extensive art and literature describing Kṛṣṇa's play, much of them in the local language of Braj Bhasa, the area takes on an imaginal aspect. *Darśan*, the viewing of the divine in the local temple mūrtis, is here mixed with a personal involvement at the narrative level.

The Yāmuna river which runs through this Braj area unites with the Ganges and the Saraswatī (which is believed to be a subterranean sacred river) at Allahabad, forming a confluence or *prayag* at which *melas*, vast periodic gatherings of ascetics and pilgrims, are centred. Here the sādhus who congregate in the Himalayan states are encountered by pilgrims, and now also by the fascinated media who have made the particularly large **Maha Kumbh Mela** festival internationally famous. As a host to an unusually powerful and public presence of the sādhu traditions, the Mela has been seen as a bastion of Hindu ascetic culture presenting an ancient 'alternate source of power' that is both protective of Hinduism, and occasionally also 'a challenge for modern society and governments' (MacLean, 2008, pp. 15–16). The sites of the *mela* are traditionally said to have been established as *tīrṭhas* or crossings to the divine, when the gods spilled drops of the nectar of immortality on the earthly landscape. Ayodhya, identified as the birthplace of the god Rāma, is a pilgrimage centre which appeals to all of those for whom the *Rāmāyaṇa* is a popular and evocative story. It appears to have been a thriving dynastic capital and mercantile centre before it became a modern symbol of Hindu heritage in the disputes over the mosque built there by the Mughal emperor Babur, and the subsequent Muslim–Hindu riots, which polarized political discourse on cultural allegiances much as the events of September 11, 2001, polarized political discourse in cultures further west.

Varanasi's religious history is ancient and can be traced to the first century BCE, situated at a ford on an ancient trade route, and renowned as a spiritual centre even at the time of the Buddha and of Mahāvīra, the founder of Jainism. Varanasi is the city at which the importance of the Ganges, as a source of purification and a *tīrṭha*, or crossing place to liberation, becomes most evident. As the Saraswatī is said to feed all sacred rivers, so Varanasi is said to exist in all other *tīrṭhas* or sacred places; this area thus claims a pan-Hindu centrality

through its level and type of sacredness (Eck, 1983, p. 40). *Ghats*, or riverside platforms, stretch along the banks allowing Hindus to purify themselves by bathing in the waters, or to have deceased relatives cremated and released into the river by priests at the funeral ghats. The importance of the city as a funerary destination leads to a developed religious culture drawing on the many rituals and beliefs surrounding death (Parry, 1994). Funerary priests have an unusual status as brahmins who are made impure by their defiling work with corpses, but are also respected and even feared as powerful figures, associated perhaps with the powers attributed to the cremation ground Śaiva ascetics who hone their inner discipline through life in this most unhospitable and impure of settings. However for most Hindu pilgrims Varanasi is known as Kashi, the city of light, and there is a rich Purāṇic mythology that associates it with Śiva who acts as a mediator for its purifying origins in the Himalayas.

While these distinctively Hindu sites – many of them rooted in Sanskritic narratives of the gods – have thrived, the cities of Uttar Pradesh have also functioned as key administrative centres for Hindu, Muslim and British governments. Today Delhi, the capital of India, lies near Agra and Fatehpur Sikri – touchstones of Mughal culture, and Lucknow was known as a centre for Indian Shi'ites under the predominantly Sunni Mughal rule, while the pilgrimage sites of Braj remain crucial modern anchors to some of the most publicly pervasive and popular Hindu devotional stories, and a large number of key Buddhist sites such as Sarnath and Kushinagar serve as reminders that the Buddha is said to have travelled extensively in the area. Uttar Pradesh is ensured a place as a turning point in Indian history by its geographical centrality to intra- and inter-continental travel, and it remains a core territory for the traditional story of 'Hindu' India.

Like Uttar Pradesh, **Bihar** shares a boundary with Nepal in the north, and follows the ancient trade routes that skirted the Ganges on its journey further eastward towards Bengal. But unlike Uttar Pradesh, it is firmly associated with the flourishing of non-Hindu cultures as the location of the ancient state of Magadha, later under the predominantly Buddhist Mauryas, as the site of Nalanda, a renowned Buddhist university established by the Guptas in the fifth century CE, and as the site at Bodhgaya at which the Buddha is said to have achieved nirvana, which now attracts international pilgrims. Patna was the centre of Chandragupta's Mauryan empire, spreading Buddhism throughout northern India under his son Aśoka, not least in the form of pillars still to be found in the landscape. Mahāvīra, the founder of Jainism, is also said to have achieved enlightenment in Bihar. It subsequently became the capital of the Gupta empire in the fourth century, and later was the location of a range of protests first against the Mughals under Vikramaditya, then against the British led by Gandhi and later of the rural population against the Zamindars, or feudal land-holders. Bihar has retained core Hindu sites at the point confluence of the Ganges and Gandak rivers where a *mela* is held, but one of its most important

associations is with the non-Vedic alternative religious culture attributed to the region of Magadha. If Uttar Pradesh is regarded as the heartland of Vedic, Epic, Purāṇic and later Bhakti Hinduism, then Bihar is regarded as the site of an ancient and alternative religious culture which complemented Vedic religion with more 'gnostic' ideologies of ascetic renunciation of the body, reincarnation and the liberation of the soul. The proliferation of Buddhist pilgrimage centres in this area, and the site of the ancient university of Nalanda, demonstrates the Gangetic plain's association with the roots of Indian ascetic and intellectual culture (Bronkhorst, 2007). It may have been in this region that competition was engaged between the ascetic practices of the yogic and Tantric styles of renunciation, and Vedic asceticism. If this is so, then the results are seen in the variegated ideologies of the major Upaniṣads and in syncretic texts such as the *Bhagavad Gītā*.

In **Jharkhand** the tensions between zamindars, colonial rulers and locals who had lived on the land were pronounced, resulting in a number of revolts in the nineteenth century, and support for Gandhi's Satyagraha movement in 1920. The pronounced tribal constitution of local society, with the 1991 census reporting approximately 40 per cent of the population as being members of tribes or scheduled castes, has made state administration difficult. With the creation of modern India, tribal cultures became divided under new identities and languages as part of Bihar, Orissa, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal and Jharkhand. Yet despite these recent administrative complications, the region remains rich in cultures, cuisines and animistic traditions that are understudied, due in part to their highly localized character. In more recent developments, a range of tribes have united to emphasize social justice under the worship of nineteenth-century social reformer Birsa Munda.

The East: Bengal, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh

For many, the eastern regions are some of the most distinctive in India. A distinctive East Indian ethos is found in the temples, stories, and theologies of Bengal, Orissa and Assam, shaped through a combination of early-Buddhist, Śākta, Tantric, Muslim and ecstatic Vaiṣṇava bhakti influences, fed from the mercantile connections of the Bay of Bengal and from East Himalayan cultures, and stirred in the crucible of vibrant urban centres sustaining a long-standing educated middle class that has included both the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava Gosvāmis who were the brahmin-educated, Muslim-employed founders of the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava traditions, and influential twentieth-century figures such as Rabindranath Tagore, who drew inspiration from a wide range of local sources.

Bengal lies at the confluence of the distinctive cultures of Himalayan Śākta worship, South Asian Tantra, the eastern and South-East Asian transmissions of

Mahayana Buddhism and the foreign cultures that arrived eastward through the Gangetic valley, and north-westward via the Indian Ocean. In early periods the same sort of tribal cultures probably prevailed in this region, as still do in regions such as Assam, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh, but under Magadha and later the Mauryans the territory was brought within the shared cultural transmissions of early Indian empire. By the early medieval period, both Vedic and Tantric traditions were influential in Bengal, with Tantric Sahajiya Buddhism focusing on the gendered perception of reality as male and female. Subsequent Sahajiya Vaiṣṇava groups united this ideology with the Vedic pantheon of the plains by expressing gendered divinity in terms of the union of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā. The ideology of expressing ultimate reality through gendered union became such a compelling and pervasive part of the culture, that when Islam became a significant force in the region in the thirteenth century, certain Sufi groups seem to have integrated it into their own **ecstatic traditions** of love for the divine, which had been so eloquently expressed in Persian poetic form. The result of these many 'erotic' ideologies was a popular focus on mystical notions of love that paved the way for Vaiṣṇava saints such as Caitanya to invest an ecstatic eroticism into the Purāṇic, temple-based theism that was growing across India. In this way Bengal's synthesis became influential on the development of the emotional style of *bhakti* religiosity, encouraging devotees to experience their participation or love for the deity in terms of 'states of trance and intense emotion', 'manifested through word and bodily state, voluntarily or involuntarily' (McDaniel, p. 2). Such states can be seen as reflecting both the visions (*dṛṣṭi*) of the Vedic ṛṣi*s*, and the possession (*āveśa*) of the Tantric dancers and initiates. It is a religious style that would become characteristic of a range of Bengali traditions, from the Buddhists to the Kali-devotion of the nineteenth-century saint Ramakrishna Paramahamsa who merged the bhakti theism of the rural temple of which he was the brahmin priest, with the tantrism of his first teacher, said to have been a female ascetic.

Bengal is today associated with the **worship of the goddess** which is clearly articulated in the modern devotion and depiction of Kali-ma as 'mother', and in the ancient styles of blood sacrifice that continue at the Kalighat temple. Village goddesses, and various other more standardized forms of female divinity, were worshipped throughout the region, predominantly propitiated as a protector against whom the worshipper must on occasion protect him or herself with offerings, and occasionally blood sacrifice as at today's Kalighat temple in Orissa. This vision of the goddess changed in the eighteenth century with the development of a tradition of devotional poets such as Ramprasad Sen, Kāmalakanta Bhattacarya and later Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, who all emphasized Kālī as a domesticated consort and mother figure. Bengal's popular modern worship of the goddess is exemplified in Durgā Pūjā, an important ten-day autumn festival celebrating the Goddess's victory over the demon Mahiṣa.

Here she is celebrated in the familiar bhakti mood of longing, addressed as Umā, the married daughter who returns from her marital home in the Himalayas with Śiva, to visit her Bengali 'family'.

Rather than falling into competition or fragmentation, the culture of the region has combined diverse strands of Hindu, Muslim and other religious elements, deriving from a wide range of regions and *jātis.* It may be that the development of flourishing, multi-faceted, cosmopolitan urban centres helped to facilitate this, with sixteenth-century Bengali *maṅgala- kāvyas*, or idealized poems in praise of particular cities, describing the ideal Bengali city as possessing streets of shops, royal compounds, happily co-existing *jātis*, *sannyasis* and mendicant pilgrims, migrant clans seeking a place to settle and a Muslim prayer hall erected by the divine Hindu architect of such a 'perfect' city, Hanumān (Dimock, 1989, pp. 117–25). Here as elsewhere folk traditions arose that focused on religious figures of indeterminate background; stories centred around Satya Pir indiscriminately portray him as a Muslim holyman or a Hindu avatār depending on the audience (Stewart, 2004, pp. 11–16). Tagore affirmed and incorporated elements of the Tantric-Muslim Baul ethos into his own poetry (Dimock, 1989, pp. 70–92), and Bengali colonial visitors such as John Woodroffe, who wrote under a pseudonym to explain and defend the Tantric worship of Kālī, are known for taking Tantric initiation while retaining his British culture and career.

In the twentieth century, having been one of India's creative 'melting pots', Bengal's cosmopolitan culture and the cultivation of intellectual education under Muslim and British rule led it to become a centre of reflection on modern issues such as political independence, religious reform, global identity, universalist philosophies and secularism. Figures such as Debendranath Tagore, the founder of the neo-Vedāntic Brahmo Samāj, and Rabindranath Tagore who used his status as an internationally renowned man of letters to shape views of India, established Bengal as a contemporary cultural centre. The school that Tagore founded in 1901, Shantiniketan, remains a symbol of the Bengali search for new Hindu ideals at the onset of modernity.

Facing east across the Indian ocean from a thin strip between the shallow coastline and the mountainous interior, **Orissa** has also developed religious forms that are distinct from the influence both of the northern Sanskritic cultures of the Gangetic plain, and the Southern Tamil culture of neighbouring Tamil Nadu. Orissa is famous as ancient Kaliṅga, the kingdom that was conquered by the Mauryan emperor Aśoka in a particularly bloody campaign that apparently led him to convert to the then-new religion of Buddhism. The rulers who followed built up a succession of extraordinary temples along the coast, including the Jagganāth Temple in Puri, the Liṅgaraja Temple in Bhubaneshwar and the Sūrya Temple in Konarak. It later came under Mughal rule, and was subsequently administratively linked by the British to Bengal, Bihar and Chennai before being recognized as a coherent region of its own after Indian independence.

The **temple communities** of Orissa developed in conjunction with ritual and devotional arts, including a tradition of devotional poetry that is exemplified in the medieval period by the *Gītagovinda* of Jayadeva, a poem that gives a rapturous account of the love of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Connected to such songs were the dance traditions that arose, supposedly through performance by temple-dancers, the *devadāsīs*. As in Bengal, Orissan religious traditions show marks of the strong Tantric and Buddhist influence that emanated both from the Himalayas and from the Southern regions, and possibly from South-East Asia. Puri marked a vibrant urban temple-culture. At the Jagannāth temple an abstract iconic mūrti of Kṛṣṇa, accompanied by his brother and sister, is displayed annually from a grand chariot in the devotional festival of Ratha Yātrā. It was here in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that the ecstatic Vaiṣṇava saint Kṛṣṇa Caitanya developed his own dance-and-music-based ecstatic tradition of worship, which he would later convey to Bengal and from there across North India to Vrindavan in Uttar Pradesh. The Bauls of Orissa, Bengal and Bangladesh continue to practise antinomian sexual enactment of the Tantric union of masculine and feminine in their rituals. They also expressed an uninhibited sense of spiritual liberation and devotion that would later influence Bengali writers. A possession tradition also continues in Orissa in which local women may be found to be possessed by a goddess such as Santoṣī Mata, and can then proceed to live and dispense blessing as the goddess on earth – providing advice and healing to devotees.

A diverse range of mainstream temple and saint traditions have thrived in **Andhra Pradesh.** It is a large and fairly affluent state that has India's longest coastline, and incorporates both a vast rural rice-growing territory, and a cosmopolitan centre with historical Muslim influence at Hyderabad. The Telugu Hindu culture of the region exists alongside the Urdu culture of the Muslim population, resulting in a rich literature that flourished in the courts of successive ruling dynasties. Assam's Hindu temple and pilgrimage sites include the Siṃhachalam temple devoted to the Narasiṃha incarnation of Viṣṇu recounted in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, the Śriśailam temple which is one of the twelve *jyotir liṅgam* Śaiva shrines described in the *Skanda Purāṇa* and the Venkateśwara temple devoted to a saviour incarnation of Viṣṇu who features in the *Varāha* and other Purāṇas. The medieval Vedāntic thinker Nimbārka was born in Andhra Pradesh, and a number of lower-caste devotional saints have come from the region, perhaps due to the loosening of caste rules during periods of Muslim rule.

Assam was known to the Gupta kings as the frontier kingdom of Kāmarupa, and underwent considerable exchange with the Sanskritic culture of North Indian states. The region features in *itihāsa* narratives, and its sovereigns are known to have conducted Vedic rituals such as the *aśvamedha* sacrifice (Sircar in Barpujri, 1990, p. 101). The Brahmaputra river which runs through Assam features prominently in Purāṇic mythologies linking it to the major classical Purāṇic

deities, and it is also possible that the rich biodiversity of Himalayan foothill regions such as Assam is reflected in scenes from the Sanskrit epics in which characters such as Arjuna and Hanumān acquire healing herbs from the mountains to aid their friends. Such scenes possibly also reflect the practices of ascetic, Tantric and shamanic traditions by those who lived in the hills. Historically, Sanskrit epic literature recognizes the non-Sanskritic 'tribal' constitution of Assam, by describing it as governed by Narakasura, the 'demon' king of Pragjyotishapur who had to be conquered by Kṛṣṇa in his guise as king of Dwarka.

While the region is well-integrated into the geographical ideology of Sanskrit literatures, the Assamese community also draws on its own village, tribal and Muslim traditions. The region is replete with the general Śākta religiosity that stretches further west to the foothills of Himachal Pradesh, and south towards the Bay of Bengal. A number of Śākta temples are devoted to Durgā, such as the Kāmakhya temple at Guwahati which is named in the Sanskrit *Śiva Purāṇa* and *Devī Bhāgavata* as one of the four main sites, or *adi śakti pīṭhas*, of the goddess's dismembered body. Consequently, a pilgrimage tradition has formed around it. **Tripura,** which forms a geographical link between the Śākta tradition of the Himalayas and that of the moist Bengali plains, also has an important *śakti pīṭha*, demonstrating that the Śākta tradition of this region had also been recognized and incorporated into the goddess traditions of Sanskrit mythology. The fifteenth- to sixteenth-century Vaiṣṇava saint Srimanta Sankardeva propagated theistic bhakti Vaiṣṇavism in Assam, yet there is also a thriving Islamic tradition followed by approximately a third of the Assamese population, resulting from the influence of a sixteenth-century Muslim *pir* known as Ajan Fakir who made his home among the Assamese tribes, and from Bangladeshi immigration in the second half of the twentieth century.

The South: Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala

The South of India contains vibrant traditions that are both important in Hinduism's image of itself as preserving a long-standing indigenous religious heritage, and have also been historically influential as the source of religious trends that subsequently became important throughout the subcontinent. The South's claim to ancient roots may be well-founded; Tamil Caṅkam poetry is some of the subcontinent's oldest literature, and Parpola has argued that the deity Murugan is a development of an Indus civilization deity (Parpola, 1994, pp. 225–32). Modern Tamil identity focuses on this sense of an ancient past, celebrating the eloquent Tamil literatures that have been the medium of influential courtly and devotional arts (Ramaswamy, 1997).

The culture of **Tamil Nadu**, occupying the south-eastern shore of India, has developed a religious tradition that was prolific in its arts, powerful in its

political affiliations and at key points in history, influential on the development of Hinduism as a whole. A significant portion of Tamil culture is derived from non-Vedic Dravidian roots, following a cultural trajectory that stands apart from that which is represented in the major northern literatures. In the early first century BCE to sixth century CE 'Caṅkam' poetry that is the earliest Tamil literature available to modern scholars, we glimpse a courtly culture that celebrates worldly concerns with nature, society and inner states of emotion (Kailāsapathy, 1968). Devotional hymns to the deity Murugan, and other deities, are but a small part of the larger corpus of poems concerned with love and war, cities and nature, the experiences of both women and men, and 'of the noumenon and the phenomenon, in Tamil terminology, of *akam* and *puram*' (Zvelebil, 1974, p. 10). Here one finds the style of vivid natural descriptions, confessional emotional voice and pathetic fallacy found in future Sanskritic as well as Tamil genres characterized by the way in which 'landscape serves as a mirror of mood' (Cutler in Flood, 2003, p. 146).

The culture celebrated in these poems thrived over the coming centuries under dynasties such as the Chola kings and queens of the early medieval period, to such an extent that 'the Kaveri basin became as important in the development of Hinduism as the Ganges basin in the north' (Flood, 1996, p. 129). The devotional literature of the **Vaiṣṇava Āḻvār and Śaiva Nāyanār saints** that developed on this cultural foundation asserted a powerful emotional mood within the framework of poignant images based initially on heroic praise of either Viṣṇu or Śiva (reflecting the feudal structure of the early societies; Hart, 1999), and increasingly on a mood of devotional love in separation (see Hardy, 2001), described with reference to evocative and detailed landscapes. The style and concerns of Tamil culture, evoking nature, society and personal relations rather than the transcendent access sought by brahmins and renouncers, would eventually pervade the subcontinent, copied by bhakti poets in a range of vernacular literatures praising Sanskritic deities. Meanwhile Tamil poetry itself became integrated into mainstream popular worship at the vast temples complexes of the region.

Devotion to a range of deities developed, with Kṛṣṇa worshipped in the form of Mayon, the dark one, beloved of the Āḻvār poets who flourished around the turn of the first millennium CE as a group ranging from farmers to brahmins, men and women, gradually becoming identified as incarnations of Viṣṇu or of his symbolic regalia such as the mace, conch and discus. The building of Śrīraṅgam temple established a focus for Vaiṣṇava traditions in the south; at the end of her life the Āḻvār poetess Āṇṭāḷ is said to have become one with the *mūrti* of Viṣṇu in the temple. Śrīraṅgam subsequently became the centre of the **Śrīvaiṣṇava movement** in which the tenth-century theologian Nāthamuni blended the bhakti ethos of the Āḻvārs with the debates about the nature of divinity that were current in Vedāntic thought. The incorporation of Viṣṇu's

consort Lakṣmī also formed a bridge between locally popular goddess and Vaiṣṇava traditions, also drawing on elements of Pāñcarātra Tantric ideology, while the qualified non-dualism (*viśiṣṭādvaita*) of the Vedāntic thinker Rāmānuja, provided a theological underpinning. In the Teṅkalai southern school of Srivaiṣṇavism the distinctive Tamil bhakti ethos of liberation through surrender to the grace of a personal god, continued to predominate.

There is also a very strong **Tamil Śākta tradition** that may have a long-standing pre-Vedic history. A warrior goddess called Korravai is praised in Caṅkam poems who is reminiscent of Durgā in her association with the slaying of buffalo, and of Kālī in her taste for the ritual self-sacrifice of warriors. The Mīnākṣī temple at Madurai is a striking example of worship of a warrior goddess in a human manifestation as the fierce daughter (and heir) of a king. She is a goddess who has become 'domesticated' as the gentle consort of Śiva, but nevertheless maintains primacy over Śiva in stories and in temple rituals. Retaining her fiercely independent as well as her gentle nature, Mīnākṣī is more reminiscent of the powerful courtesan than the subservient wife. The Mīnākṣī temple came to be described in Purāṇic narratives as the *pīṭha* where the eyes of the goddess Sati fell, and visits to the temple were incorporated into wider-ranging pilgrimage routes. The power of the goddess is confirmed in the Tamil epic the *Cilappatikaram*, in which the angered goddess Kannaki burns down her own temples city of Madurai with the heat of śakti contained within her breast. The rain/disease goddess Maariyaman is also widely worshiped at festivals around the region, and characteristically connects the Purāṇic pan-Hindu, and local propitiatory traditions by being identified on the one hand with Durgā and Pārvatī, and on the other with local goddesses of disease and possession such as Sītāla Devī and Yellamma. Evidence of other goddesses is also found in the South – the temple of the virgin goddess Kanya Kumārī, on the southernmost tip of India, dates from the early centuries BCE, providing a very different characterization of female divinity.

Temple culture flourished in medieval and early-modern Tamil Nadu, patronized by energetic southern dynasties that sought to unify their communities and confirm their authority through the centralized social structure that surrounded temple-complexes. Under the Chola kings and queens, the temples of Śrīraṅgam and Chidambaram were built, and under the Nayakas those of Tanjavur, Madurai and Senji. Each temple complex developed into a centre around which mercantile, brahminical and educational communities arose, serving locals and pilgrims who flocked to the temple. Nearby temples and shrines also benefited, becoming drawn into the pilgrimage culture, along with local peasants involved in commerce and artisanal traditions. This temple-oriented structure of society contributed to a strong independent commercial life (Rao et al., 1992) that allowed Tamil culture to continue as an independent tradition largely undominated by northern political and cultural centres. The culture that surrounded

these busy polities seems to have been a complex and fairly cosmopolitan one, and its literature contains traces both of piety and of scepticism in relation to the ulterior motives of brahmins and kings (Rao et al., 1992).

In the modern period, Tamil Nadu's foreign relations centred on Sri Lanka, its close neighbour and with the French and British outposts that existed in Pondicherry and Chennai respectively. Although it has sometimes been seen as an isolated, economically poor and developmentally 'backward' region of India, in the twentieth century Tamil Nadu's struggles to assert its political and cultural independence have led to a new dimension of Tamil Hinduism, portraying the region as a proud bastion of a pre-eminently authentic Hindu tradition. Yet the history of the region is also a melting-pot of religious influences, all of which the thriving Tamil corpus was able to assimilate: Jain and Buddhist story-cycles were written in Tamil throughout the first millennium CE, and both a Christian version of the story of Jesus, describing Joseph as a retired renouncer and Jerusalem as being much like Rāma's birthplace of Ayodhya, and a Muslim life of the Prophet, both survive from the eighteenth century (Zvelebil, 1974, pp. 159–62). Some Christians believe Chennai to be the location of the martyrdom of the apostle Thomas, who had brought a highly syncretic form of Nestorian Christianity to Kerala.

Only a small proportion of the population of **Sri Lanka** is Hindu, grouped together in the north, east and at the capital in Colombo. The indigenous Vedda peoples were largely replaced by Indo-Aryan Sinhalese peoples from the mainland who adopted Theravāda Buddhism, and Islamic groups from both African and South-East Asian backgrounds. Sri Lanka is an important home of Buddhism heartland, preserving one of the world's oldest continuous traditions brought to the island by the early mission of the Emperor Aśoka's son Mahinda. Buddhist, Tamil and Orissan kings have fought over the territories ever since, with Jaffna eventually becoming established as a Tamil kingdom, and cultural exchange taking place in the form of Tamil gods becoming integrated into the Buddhist pantheon, and shrines such as the Kataragama temple which is devoted to Murugan, becoming a focus of Buddhist, Hindu and Vedda devotion. Distinctively Tamil Hindu traditions flourished in the Hindu regions, in the form of the worship of localized worship of nature and clan deities throughout the landscape, and of Śiva and Murugan. The Thaipusan festival has become particularly famous, encouraging devotees of Murugan to take part in possession practices and penance rituals in which walking over coals, and piercing the body with hooks and spears, are endured in a painless trance in which Murugan is seen as lending his own strength and vigour to those who are truly devoted to him. The worship of Murugan's *Vel*, or spear, is also popular in Sri Lanka – the spear is a manifestation of the deity's distinctive vitality, much as Kṛṣṇa's peacock feather, flute or jewels manifest his beauty to Vaiṣṇava worshippers in Braj. More recently, Sri Lanka's Śaiva-Buddhist cultural synthesis has inspired a

Western mission established by US-born, Śivaya Subramuniyaswami, focused on a 'Śaiva Siddhānta Church' and Buddhist-style monastery in Hawaii. On a wider scale, Sri Lanka continues to loom large in the Hindu imagination through the story of Rāma's battle with the Sri Lankan demon Rāvaṇa in the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

Sharing the southernmost tip of India with Tamil Nadu, but geographically oriented towards patterns of exchange with very different continents, **Kerala** has a highly distinctive religious history that spans the extremes of Hindu tradition. It has strong traditions of religious performance, developed in classical dance, *Teyyam* possession festivals, or the Vedic culture of the Nambudiri brahmins. Communist government has shaped its cultural expression in the twentieth century, and today Kerala is economically disadvantaged but has very high levels of literacy. Distinguished both by one of the most well-preserved traditions of Vedic ritual and text, and also by festivals pertaining to lower castes, Kerala is a Hindu 'micro-culture' that has received much scholarly attention. One reason for the richness of Keralan traditions may be that the region was able to develop in a historical trajectory that was relatively uninterrupted by Islamic rule.

Like Tamil Nadu, Kerala enthusiastically embraces the worship of **Murugan**, a deity who reflects the ideal of the handsome, powerful and amorous heroic warrior. Modern Keralans describe him as a distinctively masculine deity who possesses and bestows great vitality, but worship of Murugan also reflects Tantric influence in his acceptance of blood sacrifices, and in his association from an early stage with worship through priestesses, and later through possessed mediums who engage in physical trials such as prolonged energetic dances or physical trials. Often identified with Skanda, Kumāra or Kārttikeya, the second son of Śiva, Murugan's vigour and martial prowess stands in contradistinction with Śiva's other son, Gaṇeśa. Contemporary iconography shows Murugan as a young man accompanied by a peacock, and he is often pictured beside Śiva, Pārvatī and Gaṇeśa, the members of his Purāṇic family, both in southern and northern depictions.

In Kerala as in Tamil Nadu, the temple worship of Murugan and other deities has incorporated a high degree of Tantric practice which is seen there as being orthodox and mainstream. This combines smoothly with Vedic material; the **Nambudiri brahmin** clan has maintained a tradition of rigorously transmitting the text and practices of Vedic ritual for millennia from father to son through the *kramapātha* system of 'danced' syllabic memorization. With the clan lineages of brahmins unimpeded by migration, Muslim rule or British interference, the tradition has been able to preserve its meticulous techniques for memorizing the precise words and metre of the Vedic texts. Yet transferred to temple practice, the same Nambudiri priests follow strongly Tantric styles of ritual involving maṇḍala symbols, sacred mantra utterances, treatment of the body (of the deity or the worshipper) as a sacred space and offerings of blood or meat as a sacrifice.

Transformed through successive Vedic and Tantric styles, temple rituals also took on a more popular, narrative form as court arts and literatures flourished. Bharata's *Nāṭya śāstra* claims that sponsoring a dramatic performance can earn a king as much merit as sponsoring a Vedic ritual, and ***Kūṭiyāṭṭam*** **dramas** also preserve long-standing traditions of formal temple performance (Sullivan, 1997, pp. 97–100). These dramas are highly ritualized acts performed within temple precincts by actors considered to be 'temple-servants'. They are conceived variously as a sacrifice on the Vedic model – with invocations consecrating the stage performed as a parallel to the consecration of ritual altars – with a devotional *pūjā* invocation to the gods made at the outset. Tantric influence is also clear, as actors who are ritually purified for the performance ask the gods to destroy the human-made stage and recreate it as a divine stage worthy of their sacrifice. In many ways the dramas provided a form of ritual that seemed more appropriate and pleasing to the culture of the royal courts that flourished in the medieval period, and today they continue to manifest Kerala's cultured past to its modern public. That the actors, who may be of a relatively high caste and are traditionally said to be 'half-brāhmaṇa court bards' (Sullivan, 1997, pp. 102–3) receiving the sacred thread of the brahmin, demonstrates the way in which this tradition incorporates the artistic heritage of the court-sponsored temple, into the older brahminical heritage of the ritual precinct – in both cases mediating high-caste Hindu cultures into the present.

Kerala's complex society also embraces localized religious performance for lower castes. The brahminical ritual of the temples is a 'pure' equivalent to the rituals that govern worship at lower-caste shrines. Whereas Tamil worship of the goddess finds a temple-based form in the Mīnākṣī temple at Madurai, the Keralan worship of goddesses in the form of ambivalent local deities, who either protect villages or bring disease to them, is firmly linked to the ***Teyyam*** **possession** tradition of possession. Kerala, like Tamil Nadu, is full of small shrines to the goddess centred on stones or trees, often accompanied by ant-hills inhabited by snakes. The calendar features festivals in which dancers become possessed by the goddess and give her 'revelation' by relating the stories associated with her – the original Tantric revelations may have taken a similar form. The deity worshipped at a local shrine may have a 'second life' in the temple, with a formal role as a consort or associate of the presiding deity.

Rising above Kerala and Tamil Nadu, and forming a corridor to the Maratha and Rajput kingdoms further north and the European and Ancient Near Eastern influences of the Thar desert, **Karnataka** has its own vibrant dynastic history of courtly cultures. Having been assimilated into a range of early northern polities such as the Nanda, Maurya and Satavahana empires, and subsequently becoming the centre of the powerful regional Chalukya, Rashtrakuta and Hoysala dynasties, Karnataka's cultural history is tied up with the patronage of architecture, literature, music and dance. The sixth- to eighth-century Chalukya

cave-temples at Badami incorporate images of a wide range of major Sanskritic deities, including Brahma, Śiva and Viṣṇu in his reclining, Trivikrama (cosmogonic 'three-striding'), Narasiṃha (man-lion), and Vāmana (dwarf) forms. At nearby Aihole, similar structures invited worship of the goddess as Durgā, the Saptamātṛkās or 'seven mothers', and Bhudevī, while other Karnatakan temples of the Deccan plateau depict scenes from the Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata as well as the familiar Purāṇic and Vedic stories, demonstrating the high degree to which the arts combined the 'mixed influences' of the South Indian style with the North Indian culture of Sanskritic texts and tales (Michell, 2000, pp. 74–81).

From the twelfth century the Hoysala kings encouraged a programme of temple building and literary composition in the Kannada language, and as part of the Vijayanagara empire the cultural influence of the region was extended into parts of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, making Karnataka the centre of a broader South Indian culture that preserved indigenous traditions from the impact of Muslim administrations that encroached from the north. From the sixteenth century, however, when the Vijayanagara empire gave way to the Bijapur Sultanate, Karnataka began to incorporate the culture of Persian and Urdu-speaking Muslim communities as well as Konkani Hindu and Catholic migrants from Goa, and later Tibetan Buddhists. To this mixture was added a range of tribes and a number of regional languages such as Tulu and Kodava, all contributing to the region's striking plurality. These many influences were fruitfully integrated into a variety of arts, and the eighteenth-century kingdom that Tipu Sultan of Mysore tried to protect from British rule was a stately mixture of styles and communities, that nevertheless possessed a strong regional identity.

A number of important Hindu movements originated in Karnataka under the auspices of its various Hindu empires. **Vedāntic movements** are reported here in various centuries, attesting the intellectual culture encouraged by the courts and fed by the talent of a wide geographical distribution of thinkers. Kerala and Karnataka have an important connection with non-dual philosophy; Kerala is the birthplace of Śaṅkara, the Vedāntic theologian who is renowned for his defense of the extreme advaitic perspective that has been hugely influential on subsequent theological reflection and which, for centuries, was seen by the West as the main belief of Hinduism as a whole. Śaṅkara is said to have been born around the turn of the ninth century into a Keralan Nambudiri brahmin family, and after travelling to Varanasi and Gangotri, becoming the disciple of the Buddhist-influenced Advaitin Gauḍapāda, and defeating the Mīmāṃsā philosopher Maṇḍana Miśra (and his wife) in debate, he started the first of his four *maths*, or monastic centres at Srngeri on the banks of the river Tunga. Śaṅkara's philosophy of phenomenal reality (māyā) as a superimposition (*adhyasa*) of duality onto the pure consciousness of the self (*ātman*) reflects his dialogue with Buddhist ideas, while his highly exegetical methodology owes a great deal to Gauḍapāda's Mīmāṃsā training and his

work on Upaniṣadic texts. In his *Śaṅkara Vijaya*, the fourteenth-century Advaitin Mādhava claims that Śaṅkara lived at the Srngeri monastery for twelve years, and the Śaṅkara *math* and a temple devoted to him remain there today. Mādhava himself later promoted Advaita as the pinnacle of Indian philosophy from his position within the Vijayanagara court, and is said to have ended his life as the head of the Srngeri monastery.

Two centuries later Basava, the twelfth-century Jain minister of the king of Kalyana, converted to Śaivism and laid the foundations of the **Vīraśaiva movement** in Karnataka, uniting Vedic with Tantric practice, and Advaitic monism with effusive Bhakti devotionalism. The Vīraśaivas, also known as the Liṅgayat, took Śiva as the main deity presiding over this synthesis, and worshiped him through adapted smārta rituals. The presence of the Jain communities may have helped to facilitate Karnatakan 'free-thinking' and willingness to adopt and adapt to new ideas; Basava proposed a full-scale rejection of brahminical power, with endogamous brahmins replaced by priests called *Jaṇgamas*, an equalization of castes, and a ruling that widows and menstruating women should no longer be seen as polluting. He did not succeed, but the very suggestion indicates the range of cosmopolitan ideas that were available and under consideration in the social and intellectual culture of the time. The Vīraśaivas expressed their ecstatic love for Śiva in the mode of a *viraha-bhakti* yearning for reunion after the separation of human existence, through tersely beautiful Kannada poetry.

In the twelfth to thirteenth centuries the Karnatakan Vedāntic thinker Mādhva established a following in Udipi, challenging the nuanced varieties of Advaitic thought that had become popular through the teachings of the Vīraśaivas, and of Rāmānuja who had brought his Viśiṣṭādvaita theology from Tamil Nadu to Karnataka while fleeing northward from the Chola kings. Around the turn of the sixteenth century the Śuddha-Advaita theologian Vallabha is said to have argued against dualist and Samkarite non-dualist philosophy at Vijayanagara, demonstrating the continuing vitality of its intellectual culture, and public debate. Today Karnataka remains the pluralistic home to Liṅgayats Śaivas, Vaiṣṇava sampradāyas, Vedāntins of all kinds, Jains, Muslims, Christians and a range of tribes all of whom have long-standing roots in the region, and can claim some contribution to Karnatakan culture.

The West: Goa, Maharashtra, Chhasttigarh and Madhya Pradesh

The Deccan cultures leading from central Indian down to the Arabian Sea were some of the most important dynastic societies in India's history, with courtly cultures that developed in a symbiotic relationship with the merchants who made the most of the westward-facing coastal location (Ali, 2010). They form a zone in which flourishing traditions of royal patronage of the arts facilitated the

creative promotion of epic and Purāṇic narratives. The results can still be seen in the monumental rock-cut caves at Elephanta and Ellora, in which pan-Hindu scenes such as Śiva's marriage to Pārvatī lie under the guardianship of statues of river-spirits and the Saptamātṛkā goddesses. The north–south axis of the Deccan is juxtaposed with a east–west synthesis of European and Islamic sources arriving via the Arabian Sea, with Hindu mainland cultures.

At once one of India's smallest and richest states, **Goa** is predominantly Hindu but has a strong Christian community and culture resulting from the waves of European mission that washed over its shores from the early modern period onwards. These effectively transformed it into a European colony and left a vigorous Christian community that has developed its own manners, dress, food, architecture and social structure. The state had been part of a number of Hindu kingdoms (as well as the Jain kingdom of the Kadumbas, and briefly the administration of the Mughals) until the sixteenth century when Portuguese merchants established a permanent foothold in the territory. Missionaries encountered a surprisingly flexible religious culture, and this uniquely Christianized state has developed a striking Indo-European synthesis, assimilating not only generically Christian practices and beliefs, but also the specifically Portuguese culture of the early modern missionaries who first brought the religion to the state. The local style that has yielded church-style temples, Hindu-style Christmas and Easter celebrations, and a strong local tradition of classical dance and song that transcends such divisions.

Lying at the confluence of the highland of the Western Ghats, the Deccan and the ancient Arabian Sea routes of migration and trade, **Maharashtra** traditionally takes pride in its traditions of devotional arts and worship, and in the kings who have guarded them. Śaiva worship has a long history in evidence at the cave temples of Elephanta island off the Arabian coast. Here he is depicted in his various aspects as the androgynous Ardhanar īśvara, the triple-headed Sadāśiva, as Śiva Nataraja, lord of the dance, and the ascetic teacher Lākulīśa. Vaiṣṇava traditions have also thrived under the impetus of customs of reverence for folk-deities, and the **Southern 'Sants'** who transformed them into formalized traditions of worship of universal gods lauded in devotional poetry. This is seen in the distinctive Marathi worship of Rāma as Khandobā, and Kṛṣṇa as Viṭhobā by Varvari bhakti saints such as Namdev in the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries, and Tukārām in the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries. Viṭhobā is distinguished by a highly stylized depiction, and may have originally been a local pastoral deity or ancestor (Deleury, 1960) associated with the protection of cattle and of cattle-herding castes. As such he would seem to have been gradually identified with the cowherd god Kṛṣṇa of Sanskrit myths (Eaton, 2005, p. 140). Some stories have him aiding compromised castes such as barbers and untouchable brahmins. Whatever its origin, the cult of Viṭhobā marks one of Hinduism's many points of transition between local figures and communities, and the

pan-Hindu pantheon, with the theme of 'bhakti' intimacy between devotee and deity interpreted in terms of a relationship of care and protection for the needy (Vaudevīlle, 1987, p. 224). Alongside other Kṛṣṇa-oriented sects and *sampradāyas*, the cult of Viṭhobā is part of the Maharashtran personalistic '*saguṇa*' branch of the Sant tradition that reached up through Rajasthan and the Punjab.

The expression of Maharashtran identity also took other, more martial, forms. Marathi Hindu culture was famously defended against the Mughals by the king and local hero Chhatrapati Shivaji in the seventeenth century, forming the basis of a Marathi empire that stretched to Uttarakhand in the north, and Orissa in the east. Shivaji's empire was explicitly allied with the Maharashtran flourishing of bhakti faith, and Shivaji himself is said to have been initiated by the bhakti poet Ramdas. As a result he is often thought of as a 'Hindu king'. Yet, like most such empires, the Marathi polity maintained an administrative continuity with its Mughal predecessors, using Persian in its clerical work, and incorporating Muslim communities in a fairly peaceful and egalitarian way into its legal administration. Today one of India's most populous states, Maharashtra's cosmopolitan past and diverse community is demonstrated by the fact that it still has the largest populations of Jains and Zoroastrians in India. In the twentieth century the Maharashtran spirit of Hindu pride and defence against invasive cultural forces was directed at the British colonial administration by the reformer Bal Gaṅgadhar Tilak. Tilak drew on the more martial sections of Hindu texts such as the *Bhagavad Gītā* to support armed resistance to colonial rule, and he promoted the god Gaṇeśa, whose popularity transcends many sectarian barriers, as an 'everyman's deity' that could unite Hindus. Gaṇeśa Chaturthi is still a particularly popular festival in Mumbai.

The two Sai Babas – the nineteenth-century mystic Sai Baba of Shirdi and the twentieth-century guru Satya Sai Baba who claims to be his rebirth – are powerful examples of Maharashtra's charismatic, eclectic religious culture, giving a new form to universalist traditions in the region and spreading them widely throughout India and the diaspora. Living from the nineteenth century into the early decades of the twentieth, Sai Baba of Shirdi was renowned as a holy man who lived in a mosque which he referred to as Dwaraka, combining Hindu and Muslim practices, and teaching a Sant-like universalist belief that spanned Sufi, Tantric and Vedāntic ideas. Echoing earlier holy men such as Swaminarayan who were identified with Viṣṇu further north, he became identified as a saint or avatār within the Śaiva tradition. Sathya Sai Baba, a controversial but popular twentieth-century figure, has claimed to be the rebirth of Sai Baba of Shirdi, and promising to be reborn in a further guru after the end of his current life, he has also implied that he is a divine avatār.

Situated inland and to the north, at the heart of the subcontinent, **Madhya Pradesh** has been traversed by a long string of political forces and religious traditions which left their mark on the Deccan landscape of the region. The

Bhimbetka caves contain paintings which provide rare sources for speculation on prehistoric Indian religion, and the Gupta fifth-century cave-temples and sixth-century built-temples enthusiastically integrate the major deities – Viṣṇu and his avatārs, Śiva as accompanied by Pārvatī, the Saptamātṛkās, Durgā and a range of river or tree goddesses – into elaborate unifying temples. This syncretic approach is continued in the incorporation of Jain saints into the array of famous tenth to eleventh century Chandella temples sculptures at Khajuraho, where the frightening form of Śiva as Bhairava and the sometimes-beautiful, sometimes-horrific female deities, the *yoginīs*, are carved alongside detailed humanistic scenes of kings holding court, couples in love and groups engaged in complex sexual activities. The temples open a window onto a rich court life in which the standard Purāṇic deities and the Tantric cult of the yoginīs were both welcomed. Modern Madhya Pradesh retains a particularly high proportion of 'scheduled castes and tribes' within its vast territory, as well as settlers from areas such as Afghanistan and Pakistan; in many ways it is a crucible of religious influences, combining India's ancient cultures as represented by some of the subcontinent's most famous Hindu and Jain monuments at Khajuraho and Sanchi respectively, with tribal societies and migrant communities from almost every direction. The temples that fill these regions are a striking example of the way in which, in period after period, dynastic patronage of the arts strove to integrate the diverse communities and deities that met at this centre-point of the subcontinent.

7 Future Directions: Issues and Debates

Chapter Outline

Women and Gender

The study of women in Hindu culture is important for filling the vacuum left by early scholarship that focused primarily on literature by and about men. However one of the major challenges in this area is to go beyond the simplistic polarity of viewing women as either (a) theologically elevated to divine status in the Hindu Śākta traditions, or (b) forced by Hindu patriarchal society into domestic positions of subservience to men. On one hand, the worship of goddesses was once thought to reflect a positive attitude to actual Hindu women, but research has provided little to suggest that the deification of either ideal or actual women directly benefits them in any way – indeed, it can result in greater degrees of protection, control and exclusion from the wider range of social roles. On the other hand, it is undoubtable that women have traditionally had a profoundly compromised position in society and little opportunity to directly express their own perspectives or pursue their own goals, yet scholars are also now seeking more nuanced understandings of the lives of Hindu women. The restrictions of the traditional female rôle can also be understood as one manifestation of a 'householder' ideal of human life, resulting from the prioritization of reproduction as a form of immortality in early Vedic religious culture, which affected the options open to both men and women.

It may also be the case that the focus on the domestic model of womanhood reflects the limited range of sources that are available to scholars: historians have recently sought to tell the 'alternative history' of lifestyles that did not follow this model. The study of devotional texts by women and tales about unusual female lives challenges the idea that women have no voice and no resource for empowerment within Hindu culture. Scholars are also beginning to question the assumption that women are the only gender to be explored in the context of Hinduism, with Ursula King suggesting that the study of the portrayal of men (masculinist scholarship) would be an appropriate and illuminating parallel to the study of women (feminist scholarship), and Serena Nanda and Gayatri Reddy working to bring the situation of 'other-gendered' communities such as the hijras to light (see King, 1995, p. 2; Nanda, 1998; Reddy, 2005).

A further challenge is to arrive at an accurate understanding of the way in which texts, in which women and gender appear as a cultural construction subject to the distortions of imagination, relate to the reality of actual events and lives as they are experienced. Portrayals of women may be ideal, counterfactual or merely novel, rather than recording an actual or typical woman. David Buchta notes that the character of Gārgī, the strident female philosopher of the Upaniṣads who has given her name to a women's college in modern India, may or may not correspond to any real woman, or type of woman at the time of her composition (Buchta, 2010). Similarly it is not clear whether the 'rules' of female behaviour listed in the Dharma Śāstras originally corresponded to actual practice, or whether they are merely one particular group's set of standards. Historically, the resources for female self-determination may have lain in unexpected places, such as in creativity and the enlarged possibilities available to the popular poetess or dancer, or in the celibacy of female ascetics, the religiously sanctioned sexuality of courtesans and Tantric practitioners, and even in the forms of religious authority that are furnished by motherhood and care of the home.

Underlying many such discussions is the highly contested question of what actually does benefit rather than oppress or cause disadvantage to real women. While the *pativrata* ideal of the wife who vows obedience to her husband, worshiping him as a god, may appear to limit the freedom of women and offer little protection from potential mistreatment, scholars such as Sanjukta Gupta have argued that the ritual responsibilities and ideals of virtue that Hinduism provides to women *can* function to give women a positive and autonomous position in society (Gupta in Bose, 2000, p. 96). On the other hand, Mandakranta Bose and others note that any empowerment within the traditional familial framework is limited to the roles set by a patriarchal society, and thus offers an intrinsically restricted form of freedom (Aklujkar in Bose, 2000, pp. 56–68; Bose, p. 140). Scholars are having to relate their analysis of the situations that women find themselves in to those women's own standards of fulfilment.

A major methodological difficulty facing research into the historical place of women in Hindu culture, is that most of the examples available for study are cultural ideas created largely by men. Scholars have very little access to information about real women. Sītā, Rādhā, Draupadī, Durgā, Kālī and Gārgī are known through texts that almost certainly had male authors. While they may, in some cases, act as positive influences in real women's lives, and may even have been shaped by authors with the express intention of doing so, they cannot be taken as self-representations by women of their own experiences, views or desires.

However scholars have begun to question the idea that all Hindu cultural constructions are fundamentally masculine in source and nature (Doniger, 2010). It can be difficult to tell by whom a literary work was composed; in the case of songs and oral narratives, texts can incorporate the influence of a number of authors, encompassing multiple perspectives that are sometimes in unison, and at other times in dissonance with each other. Scholars are working to uncover cases of actual female self-expression in the culture, and to reconstruct actual female lives out of the oblique historical record that is available in texts of different kinds.

Women's Lives: Beyond the Domestic Model

The accepted view has been that the highly patriarchal society in which the Vedas are rooted has led an asymmetrical ideology to predominate in Hindu cultures. This ideology, reflected in the Vedic rôle of the wife in ritual, and in the recommendations made in the Dharma Sūtras and Dharma Śāstras, divests women of the self-determination to decide their own actions, making them subservient to their fathers and husbands at each stage of life. It interprets their lives as accessories to the main narrative of men's life-goals, and thus according them a merely subsidiary value as religious and social agents whose main purpose is to aid their husbands in achieving liberation. In these sources women exist only as mothers, wives and daughters who are not themselves protagonists in the main soteriological story of achieving immortality. Indeed, the limitations of the woman's position have become an accepted theme within Hindu narratives. Women's struggles provide drama in stories such the Mahābhārata in which Draupadī earns great sympathy while bemoaning her inability to make her own decisions, or the hagiographic accounts of female saints such as Mirabai, whose persistence despite familial censure is praised highly. Such struggles can even provide festive occasions for empathy, as in Bengali celebrations of Navarātri which encourage the community to sympathize with the domestic pressures faced by the goddess Pārvatī on visits home from her husband's distant residence in the Himalayas. As we will see, it was

precisely this experience of domestic restriction that later elevated women as the preferred protagonists of many Bhakti devotional literatures.

The model of the obedient, pure wife whose influence is limited to the home, and of the familial ideal at which it is aimed, is well-attested in both legal (e.g. Manu 5, pp. 147–8) and narrative literatures. It is premised on underlying ideologies of masculine agency and feminine fertility. The traditional view seems to take the man as the assumed subject of all religious discourse. Vedic sacrificial texts are addressed to males, asking for male sons and requiring the female only as a source of sons, and an adjunct to the performance of the sacrifice – she is never the primary sacrificer and has no decision-making rights. She is, in effect, a ritual object in the sacrifice. The male is a mutable agent who is capable of a range of roles, such as the four life-stages, or *āśramas,* and the choices that can be made within them, whereas only one path of dharma is authorized for women by texts such as the *Mānava Dharma Śāstra*: while her husband may be the householder, the king, the priest, the sacrificer, the renouncer, in short, the primary person addressed in most texts, she can only be the wife whose role is to aid the male agent in achieving the religious goals that are lauded by the tradition. Indeed, proscriptions recommending that women be prevented from reading the Vedas, texts that are often cited as an essential *prāmaṇa,* or source, for achieving *mokṣa,* aimed at a society in which women were not even fully aware of other goals. Frustration with this situation is implied in the *Brhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad*'s story of the sage Yajñāvalkya's wife who insists on participating in her husband's pursuit of *mokṣa,* when he proposes to leave her at home in charge of their material possessions.

In the domestic realm to which the female is relegated in this scheme, she is divested of all of her relations and in a sense her own familial identity when she leaves her own kin to enter the husband's home. Once in her marital setting, her religious duties are all aimed at corporate goals: she performs worship, undertakes vows and draws auspicious *maṇḍalas* primarily for the good of the family as a whole. Even where the woman is valued as a precious item to be revered in these early Vedic and Dharma Sastric texts (e.g. *Mānava Dharma Śāstra* 3.56–8), her value still tends to be assessed from the perspective of her use to the male husband and son. Manu calls for the happiness of the wife in the home (3.56), but largely in the interest of securing her blessing and maintaining the auspicious status of the household. These ideologies can be seen as supported by Vedic male-gendering of the sacrificer who is, arguably, the model for all subsequent ideas of the religious agent in texts such as the *Upaniṣads* and *Bhagavad Gītā*, and by the Veda's linking of the householder's earthly and post-mortem life to his male offspring. In these texts women do not speak as the author, are not spoken to as the subject, nor are they considered in their possibilities and value as reflective religious agents, rather than in relation to the value that they bring to the men.

Underlying these domestic perspectives is the idea that women's very nature is premised almost wholly on her biological function as a sexual agent and a source of offspring. A menstruating female who was potentially sexually active outside the bounds of the domestic sphere was seen as volatile and in need of control. Usually married at a young age, in an exchange that involves considerable financial incentives, such a woman is to be 'protected' by her father, and after marriage, her husband and, finally, as a widow by her son. The biological determinants of Hindu women's religious identity were concretized through the principles of purity and purification: menstruating women and those associated with childbirth are considered impure and barred from certain places, activities and interactions. As a source not of children but of sexual activity, women were seen as a serious temptation to the various celibate traditions. Semen was considered a source of spiritual energy and *tapas*, and women represented a temptation to release it. In *itihāsa* literatures unmarried women not only drive men mad with passion, preventing them from achieving their goals, but also at times do so intentionally in accordance with their essential nature (described in Sāṃkhya thought) as *prakṛti* – the source of all ignorance, illusion and desire (Dhand, 2008, pp. 74–80).

Texts such as the story of Pururuvas and Urvaśī in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, and the many charms for luring a desired woman in the *Atharva Veda* may suggest contexts in which men sought to obtain and secure relatively elusive and independent women as wives. Not every tradition supports the 'conventional' model; for example, while most north-western Hindus focus on the relationship between Rāma and Sītā at Divālī – a relation which ended due to doubts about whether Sītā has been sexually compromised during captivity – some southern regions focus more strongly on the celebration of Kṛṣṇa and his wife Satyabhāmā, who battle another demon-king together as a couple, after which Kṛṣṇa enthusiastically takes in all of the thousands of women abducted by the demon as his wives, blithely ignoring any potential concerns about their sexual purity. In its retelling in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, this version of the story serves as a sub-plot or 'echo' of the main plot that offers alternatives to the values expressed by the dominant narrative, albeit in an implicit and non-confrontational way.

However in Sastric texts the desire for control seems to have become a priority and the provision for female lifestyles with relative self-determination has almost completely disappeared. Texts such as the Dharma Śāstras, and particularly the *Mānava Dharma Śāstra* came to function and be recognized as the touchstones of an oppressive social structure to the extent that, as recently as 2000, a copy of the *Mānava Dharma Śāstra* was burned as a gesture of protest by women's rights advocates in Rajasthan. While such texts were not 'law' in the sense of being part of a centralized juridical system until the British integrated them into colonial government, in many communities they were tacitly enforced

through other means such as familial and social pressure, ostracization and physical force.

The situation should not, however, be seen as a simple one. The ideology of domestic restriction is premised on a recognition of female power that has produced ambivalent portrayals of women. Female control over fertility is a control over the goals of all individuals who see themselves in terms of the family, and over human experience as a whole: in a family-oriented society the male has no purpose or identity without the female, as we are reminded by Purāṇic ideas that the male deity is powerless without the female energy or *śakti* of his consort. Manu writes that the current social structure of multiple *jātis* or specialized endogamous clans, as opposed to the four *varṇas* described in the *Ṛg Veda* which Manu describes as the ideal, is the result of women creating familial links between the castes through their uncontrolled sexual activity (e.g. Manu 3.15–17). In the ideology of the early Vedas she also possesses soteriological power, as it is only through her that the sons through which a father achieves immortality can be born. The feminine gifts of nurturing as a mother, and fertility as a wife, were expressed in the ideology of the earth (*Pṛthivī*) as the literal ground of the sacrifice (the female-gendered *vedi* was the standard hour-glass-shaped earthen-pit for sacrifices). In the depiction of the earth as that which sustains all peoples, generations, regions, animals, things, sources of health and parts of life in *Atharva Veda* 12.1, there is a hint of what men saw as being at stake in their relations with daughters, wives and mothers.

It may be that in Vedic texts that liken women to the field that is ploughed by the husband, and envision her value and possession in a similar way, the model of domestic control was based on the rise of landed agrarian society as opposed to pastoral or trade-oriented modes of society. Bose notes this distinction with regard to the accounts of Sītā in different versions of the Rāma story (Bose, pp. 219–20). The system of agrarian capital affirmed in the *Ṛg Veda* inspired a concurrent emphasis on lines of inheritance through which capital could now be inherited; for what other purpose does one amass funds that will outlast one's own life? A child-bearing wife and a fertile husband were both pre-requisites for achieving this goal. The biological imperative thus can be seen as a function of a new agrarian mindset which led both men and women to reformulate their identity and social roles. This ideology is not in itself aimed at the demotion of women, rather it subjects the whole of society to the same imperative. Men also must bend to this priority, and may also suffer under it, as when an infertile husband must sexually yield his wife to a brother or other surrogate in order to ensure offspring. It was not until other over-arching human goals became available in mokṣa-oriented renouncer religions that were eventually incorporated into bhakti traditions through transitional texts such as the *Bhagavad Gītā*, that the options changed for both women and men.

Thus Hindu culture does not *simply* victimize and denigrate women: their restriction is based on underlying developments in the different goals that it prescribes for human life and society. Even with new goals, all sanctioned alternatives to the domestic path exchanged familial for other forms of control. Alternative social roles for women can be seen as part of a system of 'default norms' and 'accepted variations' – it was (and is) undeniably more difficult for a woman to become a *sādhu* or ascetic, a guru or a leader of a sect or *sampradāya*, but under the right circumstances women have filled each of these roles. Both the ritual injunctions of the Veda and the laws of Manu proceed by a method that describes one standard rôle as the default for all action (in both texts this is most often the brahmin, but in epic texts, for instance, it may be the *kṣatriya*), and extends its applicability to others by listing exceptions. In this way the whole community is brought into a structure of default agents and exceptions that legitimates lifestyles outside the norm.

'Legal' texts are *prescriptive* rather than *descriptive* of what was actually happening in society, and they give the scholar little clue to the other models that may have existed and swayed the actions of the populace. The *Atharva Veda* contains charms that suggest a very different set of female concerns and sexual relations than the ones reflected in Manu and the *Rāmāyaṇa*: there are charms to call to a man (7.38) or make him infertile (6.138), to curse a female rival (3.18), for easy childbirth (1.11), and for men to make a wife return home (6.77), to arouse a woman's desire (3.25) and to put everyone else to sleep during a nocturnal assignation (4.5). From the Brāhmaṇas through to modern literature, narrative depictions of women show that the reality was more complicated than the ideal. The *apsaras*-wife Urvaśī who is temporarily espoused, producing sacrifice-offering offspring and thus earning her husband entrance to heaven in *Ṛg Veda* 10.95, nevertheless begins and ends with her independence. Gārgī and Maitreyī take part in debates alongside their husbands in the Upaniṣads, the good wives Sītā and Draupadī justly criticize their husbands in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* respectively, while daughters like Savitṛi are invited by their fathers to choose their own husbands, or like Sulabha, to establish their own solitary spiritual practice in the forests. In the *Purāṇas* both of Śiva's wives choose him despite their fathers' concern, and wives like Rādhā find and fulfil their sacred love outside of the socially legitimate bonds of their marriage. These stories cannot be interpreted as describing the norms of women's lives in Hindu societies; in many cases they doubtless caught the imagination precisely because they describe tale-worthy exceptions. But they indicate possibilities of which the community of listeners were aware, encouraging scholars to fill out the ideal picture painted by the prescriptive texts of the Vedas and Dharma Sūtras and Śāstras with investigation into the more complex context of the actual lives of women.

Scholars, Ascetics, Gurus, Sacrificers, Lovers, Courtesans and Leaders

As with all historical study, it can be extremely difficult to find sources of information on the lives of real women in past Hindu societies. The nature of the available sources – in rare historical texts or administrative records for instance – means that the resulting picture can be biased towards certain classes or regions. Nevertheless through reference to certain examples and types of women in literature of different kinds, it is possible to build up a more varied picture of the place of women in Hindu society.

The fact that the *Ṛg Veda* appears to refer to female sages (e.g. Ṛṣi*kās* such as Lopāmudrā, the wife of the sage Āgastya, and at 1.179; 5.28; 8.91; 10.39), and Upaniṣadic references to women taking part in courtly debates on the nature of reality and the soul have led some to suggest that **female high-caste scholars** participated in the intellectual culture of the courts, free to take part in debates along with men (see Findly, 1985; Deshpande, 1992; Patton in Leslie, 1996, pp. 21–38). Examples of scholarly wives who appear to form intellectual partnerships with their husbands, can be found in a range of literatures. Hagiographic accounts record that in the debate between the Pūrva Mīmāṃsā scholar Maṇḍana Miśra, and the Uttara Mīmāṃsā scholar Śaṅkara, it was Maṇḍana Miśra's wife Ubhaya Bhāratī who acted as referee, challenging Śaṅkara on his knowledge, and nevertheless finally finding him to be the victor over against her husband. Of course such literary, theological and hagiographic accounts cannot be read as direct history, and it has been difficult to confirm the existence of these 'women scholars' from historical sources. Scholars such as Brian Black have tried to develop methodologies for distinguishing factual from rhetorical accounts, by comparing the portrayal of Gārgī with that of her male disputants (Black, 2007). Nevertheless the image of the philosophically minded Upaniṣadic noblewomen Gārgī and Maitreyī has loomed large in subsequent ideology, possibly establishing a model for the outspoken wife who advances wisdom through her knowledge as seen in the figure of Draupadī in the *Mahābhārata*, and providing an ideological touchstone for the modern drive to educate women.

Literary evidence suggests that in early periods, women in certain situations – such as members of the families of renouncers and gurus – were occasionally able, and sometimes required, to participate in renunciatory self-exile to the forest, and ascetic practice. Manu 8.363 alludes to **female ascetics**, and in the epic literature and Purāṇas, Sītā, Draupadī and Pārvatī all adopt the ascetic lifestyle of their husbands (or in Pārvatī's case, her intended husband), while the *Mahābhārata*, and following this Kālidāsa, depict the enamoured king Purūravas as mirroring this pattern by renouncing his duties as king to follow his otherwordly lover into a life in the forest. Pārvatī is said to excel so greatly in her austerities that male ascetics are driven to envy. In the *Mahābhārata*, as in Kālidāsa's play, Śakuntalā

grows up in her father's āśrama and in this way naturally acquires the ascetic lifestyle, as did Uddālaka's daughter Sujātā. There is also reference to at least two female ascetics, the daughter of Bṛhaspati and the female mendicant Sulabhā, who were not dependent on a family context for their ascetic freedom, but wandered at will. Some, like the aged ascetic Diśā are described as initiated disciples acquiring spiritual merit and soteriological reward, while others, such as the daughter of Kuṇigarga, are said quite clearly to have chosen their own path, and to live in solitary autonomy without the protection and control of a father, guru or husband (see Dhand, 2008, pp. 80–90 for these and other examples). Some of these women are said to go to heaven, but others use their discipline, like many male ascetics, to achieve specific rewards, as demonstrated by Pārvatī, Draupadi and Śruvavati's winning of a husband through austerities, or Ambā's attempts to achieve the death of Bhīṣma. While female ascetics are not traditionally common in Hindu society, Jainism retains a definite place for female monks that may reflect a tradition once shared to a greater degree by Hinduism. In contemporary India and Indian diasporas, women are emerging as female ascetics.

The notion of 'choosing the forest as a husband' (*Mahābhārata* V.118.5) fits well with the ethos expressed by Mahadevīyakka, a Vīraśaiva **woman poetess** of Karnataka who left her husband to take up an alternative lifestyle as female poet and wandering ascetic (see Zabbe et al., 1989). Her lifestyle was eased by the relatively egalitarian ideologies of the Vīraśaiva group in Karnataka. She is an example of a female whose religious path was significantly facilitated by the growing currency of Bhakti ideas that added a further facet to the 'imaginaire' of women particularly prone to higher degrees of devotion to god. Devotional groups valorized ecstatic personal engagement with the divine, attested by creative expression, and this provided a legitimate lifestyle which remains available to some Hindu women today (Zelliot, 2000). Mirabai, the Rajput princess who, like Mahadevīyakka, rejected her family to pursue a life devoted to her chosen deity, has provided a template to which actual women can refer those who question their lifestyle (Harlan, 1992). The experience of social repression looms large in the songs attributed to Mirabai, and she herself does not leave the community as an ascetic, as Mahadevīyakka does, but rather stays within the community as an (arguably even more challenging) unmarried woman who socializes without lower castes. Āṇṭāḷ the famous female poet of the Āḻvār school who is integrated into the hagiography of the Āḻvārs as an incarnation of an aspect of Viṣṇu, differs from Mahadevīyakka in affirming traditionally 'feminine' experience as a valued and enjoyable medium of worship. She writes of young girls as endowed with the capacity to enjoy and worship Viṣṇu, rather than wholly rejecting society and body in a mood of renunciatory longing.

In some Tantric traditions, female practitioners could be wives or women who professionally took part in rituals. **Tāntrikas** could even be accorded their own status as independent religious agents, acting as independent mediums of

Tantric teaching and initiation in their own right. Sometimes – particularly in the more orthodox right-handed traditions – these women participated in a purely symbolic capacity as manifestations of the goddess. But in others they did engage in sexual activity as manifestations of the great or local goddesses, with the sanction of initiated religious disciplines and soteriological purposes. In the Buddhist context at least, there is reason to believe that Tantric ideologies of the woman as independent possessor and mediator of power, facilitated alternative lifestyles with greater freedom for women (Shaw, 1994). In areas of varied background that were accustomed to eclectic social synthesis, women were sometimes able to draw upon a range of ideologies to support a religious lifestyle of theirs on choosing. Hagiographic accounts claim that Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, the nineteenth-century Bengali ecstatic saint, received his teachings from a solitary middle-aged female ascetic named Yogeshwari, who was the daughter of a brahmin, wore orange robes, cited Caitanya Vaiṣṇava theology and claimed to derive her knowledge from a Tantric '*bhairava*' lineage (Isherwood, 1965, p. 89). The colonial British Tantric initiate John Woodroffe is also said to have taken instruction from a 'bharavi' female ascetic teacher. It may be that such female Tantric teachers are envisioned in texts like the *Gītagovinda*, in which Rādhā gradually 'teaches' Kṛṣṇa, who submits himself to her; certainly regions oriented to Śākta goddess worship and Tantric traditions adopt their own distinctive interpretations of the text (Hein, 1972, pp. 267–71). More generally, it is possible that the Tantric ideal of the powerful and energetic woman led to a different ethos for women in areas influenced by Tantric cultures.

Although women have often been encouraged to become mystics and devotees rather than religious leaders, women have occasionally been religious specialists, leading rituals (particularly in the domestic sphere but also in Tantric rituals, and possibly also in Vedic contexts (see McGee, 2002), teaching pupils and guiding theological lineages. In certain cases the academic record is complicated by the fact that they functioned as *de facto* **religious leaders** in domestic, Tantric or *sampradāya* communities, but were not 'officially' recognized and recorded as such. Sītā Devī, the wife of a Caitanya Vaiṣṇava teacher who died, led the sect until their son's majority; while her capability and authority were recognized at the time, official hagiographic ideologies found little place for her story (see Rebecca Manring in Pechilis, 2004). This fact in itself indicates that circumstantial need took priority over 'theory'; nevertheless it was the theoretical ideals, recorded in texts that influenced each group's cultural self-representation. In such cases where female leaders are omitted from records such as hagiographies or political histories, we can see the clear processes by which scholarship is prone to 'miss' the facts about Hindu women. In the modern period a number of female gurus have emerged as a response to shifts in attitudes to women in the public domain and in political leadership (see Pechilis, 2004).

There is increasing attention to the way in which, although men dominated observances in the public arenas of Vedic sacrifice and the temple, women have long been the authoritative **domestic ritualists** in the home, and in certain designated arenas of village worship. Women are generally placed in charge of the rituals of worship in the home, overseeing *pūjā* at the domestic shrine, and initiating children into the life of worship. This relates to the way in which, as keepers of the household, they are *de facto* also in charge of the maintenance of ritual purity in matters of food and cleanliness. Bose has written about the way in which household vows, or *vratas*, are also matters of female jurisdiction, establishing a centre of female religious authority and influence (Bose, 2010). Vows may be undertaken for private benefit, or for that of the whole household, thereby placing the well-being of the family in the mother's hands. For many women the sphere of domestic ritual offers the valorization of mothers as important members of society, in a way that Western culture and more specifically Christian spiritual practice has arguably lacked. Scholars have noted that ritual worship in the home and sometimes also in the temple has functioned in diaspora contexts as an important place for women to gather, creatively contribute to Hindu culture and take on leadership within the community (Rayaprol, 1997; Huffer, 2010). It is perhaps wrong to reduce the actual homelife of all Hindu women to the ideological construct of submissive domesticity found in *Dharma Sastric* texts and idealized *itihāsa* portrayals. Tracy Pintchman redefines domesticity as a physical and social space, and aims to 'emphasize female innovation and agency in constituting and transforming both ritual and the domestic realm' (Pintchman, 2007). The responsibilities and capability of women at the second tier of domestic governance is recognized in those narratives which show women as the ones who must resolve disastrous situations when the men fail, both in epic stories such as that of Draupadī who must cleverly save her husbands from their catastrophic losses in gambling, and in folk stories such as the Bengali tales of 'Satya Pir' in which the female character 'lurks in the background as the foundation of stability' and may, if only temporarily, become the protagonist (Stewart, 2004, p. 21).

In contrast to the life of the wife who pro-actively and creatively takes control in the home and family, some women assumed the rôles of **lovers and courtesans**. While the illicit lover-goddess Rādhā has almost never been taken as a source of legitimation for the same activity in actual women, in the right society at the right time, courtesans could have good lives, relative self-determination and considerable social power. This has also been true beyond the Hindu context in other societies. Rao notes that:

> . . . the Maratha-period courtesans, very prominent in the artistic domain, assume a brazen self-confidence that builds upon the earlier articulation of their rôle: they establish *agraharams* named after themselves, build and

> endow temples and tanks, perform *annadāna* [gifts of food] on a grand scale, celebrate the marriage of the temples gods, support scholars with gifts of money, have literary works dedicated to them, and, of course, receive the patronage of kings. (Rao et al., 1992, p. 316)

The *Mahābhārata* describes one courtesan, Pingalā, who like the king Bhartrhari, is disillusioned by a disappointing experience of love (her lover dies), and is thereby inspired to a higher realization of truth. Her situation is portrayed as a move from a worse to a better life, but there is no implication that her previous life was particularly immoral due to her status as a courtesan (as for instance in the case of the biblical courtesan Mary Magdalene). Like the gopīs in the Kṛṣṇa tradition, Piṅgala expresses her new love for the divine in still-amorous terms; a tone that is quite different from the body-and-sex-denigrating language employed by Mahadevīyakka. When the female ascetic Kuṇigārgya, who has chosen and enjoyed her autonomous solitude throughout her life, prepares to die, she marries briefly at the last minute, finding a reluctant husband. When, having magically taken the form of a beautiful woman and won her husband's heart during their night together, she dies, he then follows her into death in a *satī*-like act of sacrificial widower-hood (*Mahābhārata*, IX.51.3–23). Vishnu's incarnation as an alluring woman called Mohinī who traps demons through her attractive form and conceives a child with Śiva, may be seen as affirmation of women who judiciously use their sexuality for good goals, from a position of relative self-determination.

It has been suggested that so-called temple prostitutes or entertainers, ***devadāsīs,*** also enjoyed a higher degree of self-determination or sexual freedom through their religious rôle. In some cases 'elite' *devadāsī* women became part of matrifocal households of women who held land, were educated in the arts, performed in courts and could choose to have relations with men. Such women were often dedicated as consorts to the god of a particular temple and their high religious status was demonstrated to the community by the religious privileges which they held at the temples (Marglin, 1985; Orr, 2000; Parker, 1998). In lower-caste village situations, however, such women could be seen as manifestations of local goddesses and, ironically, were less likely to be in charge of their own household and more likely to have been forced into their situation by poverty. If it is true that these rôles offered improved lifestyles for women, then the Colonial censure and eventual outlawing of these professions served to limit the paths that Hindu ideologies made available for women in society.

The Female Voice in Devotional and Epic Literature

It is difficult to assess the experiences of women, whatever their lifestyle, without access to texts expressing their own views. Yet there is little material written

by women on which to draw. Addressing this need, Julia Leslie's injunction to seek out Hindu women and listen to their own self-understanding has been answered by a range of contemporary scholars using anthropological methods, but sources for the past remain scarce. Women poets, usually writing within devotional traditions and literary styles, have become an important source of 'women's voices' in Hindu Studies. A famous verse in the *Bhagavad Gītā* proclaims that women, *śūdras* and low-born people can achieve *mokṣa* through the new dispensation of devotion to Kṛṣṇa (9.32). Women had greater participation in the various modes of *bhakti* religious expression than in those linked more directly to the Vedas. Devotional literature frequently speaks in the female voice, reflecting the idea that all devotees are female in relation to god, just as Sītā is devoted to Rāma, Rādhā to Kṛṣṇa and Pārvatī to Śiva. The expression of devotional attitudes through an emphasis on female experience is found as much in devotional poetry by male authors as by female ones: Jayadeva and Rūpa Gosvāmi wrote in the emotionally expressive voice of Rādhā, and for the anonymous female voices used in South Indian Śrīvaiṣṇava Āḻvār poetry, the community invented the personas of 'Lady Parankusa' for Nammāḻvār, and 'Lady Parakala' for Tirumankai Āḻvār (Narayanan in Flood, 2003, p. 571). Such southern devotional literature may have developed out of the female-voiced *akam* love poetry found in the Tamil Caṅkam literature, adding religious tones to the existing language of longing (Hardy, 2001). In the large corpus of oral literature it is impossible to untangle the composition of such texts, and any female authorship they may contain is lost to scholarly analysis. It may be the case that women's tellings or interpretations of bardic narratives were appropriated to the tales as enriching additions that lent authentic depth to the characters and poignant twists to the plot. Such influence, however, can only be studied by approaching the text as a cultural 'imaginaire' in which certain themes arise and exist without reference to particular points of biographical origin.

The fact that women were taken from an early stage to be the ideal expressive lover is itself interesting, raising questions about the cultural centrality of the female psyche. Sudhir Kakar has suggested that the feminine perspective has been standard in Bengal, in marked contrast to the 'male-neutral subjectivity' attributed to Western cultural norms (Kakar, 1990). In Vaiṣṇava devotional contexts, men are expressly encouraged to adopt the subjective perspective of the female characters, reflected in the idea that saints from Caitanya to Ramakrishna would find themselves possessed by the persona of Rādhā. In the Śrīraṅgam temple in Tamil Nadu, the *mūrti* of Nammāḻvār is dressed in female clothes when his songs in the female voice are sung. Vasudha Narayanan writes that such devotional practices 'point to fluid gender identifications, [and] the transcendence and rejection of gender polarities' (Narayanan in Flood, 2003, p. 569). This could suggest contexts where, in opposition to the West, Hindu

culture assumes a 'female-neutral' subjectivity patterned after 'feminine' cultural norms (Frazier in Anderson, 2009; Kakar, 1990).

The characteristic features of the female devotional voice are love in the specific form of deep emotional longing, intensified by a sense of powerlessness to resolve the situation. The lack of personal determination of women is frequently invoked in these works as a way of heightening empathy. Thus Radha's status as *parakiya*, another man's wife, is emphasized by some poets in order to heighten the tragic irony of her passion for Kṛṣṇa. The very circumstance of separation is more easily placed in the mouth of a woman who cannot simply set out alone and travel to the beloved, than of a man. This too echoes the Caṅkam poetry in which female love was frequently phrased in terms of a wife who has been left behind by the soldier called to battle. Interestingly, Rūpa Gosvāmi's emphasis on the male longing of Kṛṣṇa in poems such as the *Hamsaduta*, or 'Swan-Messenger', frame him within the phase of his life-story in which he is being prevented from returning to his beloved by his duties as Prince of Mathura; here too social duties are represented as restricting desire.

Other moments are also featured in the emotional narrative of devotional love (the bliss of union, or anger at being deserted) but longing, framed by a situation of *viraha-bhakti*, or love-in-separation, remains the dominant framework. In these cases it is precisely the sense of frustration arising from the restrictions placed on women, juxtaposed with their capacity for deep feeling and imaginative inner activity, resulting in a profound sense of emotional danger and abandonment that distinguishes the female voice as a desirable literary form. These portrayals were influential on the attitudes of the wider community: Nammāḻvār's poem the *Tiruvāymoli* is used in temple liturgy, the *Gītagovinda* of Jayadeva is regularly sung as a popular cultural event, and regardless of their gender, Caitanya Vaiṣṇava devotees are often encouraged to adopt the personas of female figures within the story of Kṛṣṇa, as did Caitanya himself, who is seen as a manifestation of both Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā.

We have reason to believe that Mirabai's poems to Kṛṣṇa, and the Śiva-centred poetry attributed to Karaikkā Ammāiār, Lallā Yogeśvarī and Mahadevīyakka, could indeed have been composed by those women, although it is as impossible to be certain of this, as it is to be certain that only men contributed to the composition of other works. Hawley has compared the female voices of the female poet Mirabai and the male poet Surdas, both speaking as gopīs in love with Kṛṣṇa in neighbouring regions at adjacent times drawing on the same sources (Hawley in Bynum et al., 1986). It is interesting to note that female poets rarely wrote in devotion to independent goddesses such as Kālī and Durgā; more frequently, they wrote in the voice of lovers, to Śiva or Kṛṣṇa, and were in fact celibate.

Mandakranta Bose has committed to the search for appropriations of female characters by women in a way that reinvests them with an authentically female

voice. She notes that the complex Sītā of the classic version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* attributed to Vālmikī retains her character as a woman who stands for both loyalty and justice, in contrast to the more silent and submissive wife of influential later versions such as the *Ramcaritmanas* of Tulsīdās. In a sixteenth-century version that claims to be by the Bengali writer Candravati who is a 'Hindu village woman who had known suffering, a woman who had the courage to choose the lonely intellectual life of a poet, in sixteenth century rural Bengal', the character of Sītā is brought to the foreground of the Rāma story. This purportedly female retelling narrates the whole train of events in the form of a biography of Sītā, expressing her own female viewpoint as a woman. This version tells the story, sometimes through the first-person voice of Sītā, in terms of the distinctively female experiences of childhood, marriage, abduction, pregnancy and childbirth, motherhood, marital strife and social censure. The author gives a fuller expression to her frustrations than does the Vālmikī *Rāmāyaṇa*, blaming *dharma* for the cruel twists of fate that she endures (Bose, 2000, p. 185). Bose infers from the feminine forms of address contained in the text, that its intended audience was also female – if so this is an interesting case of a version of a pan-Hindu narrative that is told within the framework of a female 'imaginaire', for a female community.

Cultural Representations: Goddesses, Heroines and 'Feminine' Metaphysics

There is considerable debate over the question of how the goddesses, with their diverse personalities and divine lifestyles that are often so different from the social norm, relate to real women's lives. Some have suggested that the goddesses are merely a projection of men's feelings about women, or about their own 'feminine' sides. Women who become possessed and worshiped as goddesses rarely acquire any heightened power, freedom or other advantages from it, whereas deification can in fact operate as an alienating factor, for, as Mandakranta Bose reminds us, a 'devī' is by definition written out of common human interactions (Bose, 2010, p. 13).

On the other hand there is also evidence of goddesses legitimating female freedom or power, as association with the goddess did for Tantric ascetics, and may have been the case with regard to Sītā Devī's unofficial leadership of the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava tradition in which the goddess Rādhā and the female *gopīs* were taken as spiritual exemplars. The significance of the Goddess works at different, sometimes contradictory levels. Goddesses can be feminine in a semiotic sense, signifying or merely having certain abstract traits. Or they can be feminine in a narrative sense, acting out feminine traits or situations in a way that relies more heavily on psychological and sociological circumstance. There

is also an important distinction between goddesses such as Lakṣmī, Rādhā and Pārvatī, who are viewed primarily in terms of their relation to their consorts, and Durgā, Kālī and a number of smaller-scales goddesses, who are worshiped as independent goddesses. Kālī and Durgā's task is not to serve the personal or social orders of men, but to preserve the community as a whole while bearing the tools of personal autonomy: weapons as well as the conch of Viṣṇu, the trident of Śiva and the mace of Hanumān. Bengali maṅgala kāvya poetry describes women as co-operating with such goddesses to bring men back to their worship (Dasgupta and Bose in Bose, 2000).

Nevertheless, it seems that goddesses who stand wholly outside of social structures rarely serve to liberate those who are within them; the analogy between them is perhaps too strained to become relevant to the everyday life of women. It is the figures who derive their significance from explicit narratives of domestic life and escape from social restraint who appear to be more frequently drawn on as inspirational and legitimating forces for actual Hindu women. In such narrativized expressions of female divinity – as of Mirabai, Sītā, Draupadī, Rādhā and Śakuntalā – it is the turns of character, brought out by circumstance, that lend the deity her significance to devotees. Rādhā is an example of this, made appealing or 'sweet' to devotees through her pride, vulnerability and passionate nature, as is Umā or Pārvatī in her worship during Durgā Pūjā in Bengal, in the persona of the daughter-in-law who has to engineer a visit to her family to comfort her pining parents. The typology of female characters in literature can be arranged with Sītā, the self-abnegatingly obedient wife, at one end, and Rādhā, the proud, desirous, and sometimes unmarried or adulterous lover, at the other, with Draupadī, the independent-minded wife in the middle. Other popular characters may express the positive aspects of women's daily lives, such as the maternal love exemplified by Kṛṣṇa's mother Yaśodā, and the protective female friendships richly expressed in the sakhīs, or friends of Rādhā. The emotional complexity and autonomy of these characters is well-documented: these are realistic women who have an inner life that is not controlled by their society or lovers, even if their actions are. These goddesses reflect the realities of childbirth, familial relations, marital discord and desire, and the worship of goddesses allows for structured, themed contexts in which women come together as a community, engaging with shared female experiences through relevant goddesses, such as Saṣṭhī, the goddess of childbirth (Sengupta, 2010), or Rādhā in relation to her female friends (Pintchman, 2007, pp. 55–64). Such figures attract interest and empathy as a more accurate reflection of the lives of women in Hindu history than the independent goddesses.

Whereas feminist writers in the Western tradition have noted that notions of reality and selfhood tend to be described in an implicitly 'masculine' way, Hinduism also contains an explicitly '**feminine' metaphysics of *prakṛti***, the ever-proliferating nature of the phenomenal world. The early Sāṃkhya school saw

puruṣa, the unchanging core of consciousness as male. But it designated *prakṛti*, the dynamic phenomenal world that includes objects, properties and thoughts, as female. With the incorporation of Sāṃkhya ideas into the Bhakti traditions via the Purāṇas and subsequent Vedāntic theologians, the feminine metaphysics of *prakṛti* was identified with many goddesses. The notion of the male deity as *puruṣa* and the female as *prakṛti* provided a metaphysical rationale for the worship of consorts.

While in some contexts *prakṛti* was linked to māyā, 'illusion' or 'manifestation', many Purāṇic and Neo-Vedāntic texts, some of which incorporated Tantric ideas, came to affirm the feminine side of the deity as the generative force or energy (***śakti***) that facilitated the creation of the world. *Maya* itself could also be seen as a positive force, as in Kṛṣṇa's reference to his *yoga māyā* in the *Bhagavad Gītā* as the force by which he manifests the world and presents a personal aspect to his devotees. Innumerable *mūrtis* of male deities such as Śiva, Gaṇeśa, Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa, feature the god's '*śakti*' as a female deity (Pārvatī or Umā, Lakṣmī or Rādhā), located to one side. This ideology contributed to the elevation of female consorts such as Lakṣmī and Rādhā to pre-eminent status as the highest form of the divine. Sāṃkhya's feminine metaphysics gives women a religious identity as more than merely accessories to men's goals. It is not clear, however, whether the portrayal of the feminine aspect of reality as a changeable procreative energy employed by an unchanging male divine subjectivity, is simply a reiteration of the domestic model of the woman as a subordinate reproductive source.

Alternatively women have drawn on the neutral-gendered metaphysics of self as ātman, and reality as *brahman*, as an ideology that allows for greater claims to equality and freedom. Mahadevīyakka asserts her inner freedom in contrast to her physical and social identity in her poetry, and the character of Sulabha in the *Mahābhārata* similarly claims that bodies, marked as they are by physical difference and inequality, are of little importance in comparison to souls which are the same and permeable.

Beyond the Male–Female Polarity: Other-, Multi- and Un-gendered Selves

Some traditions within Hindu culture not only affirm a range of gender roles for men and women, but also 'keep the boundaries permeable and fluid' (Narayanan in Flood, 2003, p. 586). The gender of deities is strikingly mutable and permeable. Many deities with a consort can be worshiped in a combined form, often represented by a *mūrti* showing the deity as vertically divided into female and male halves. This divine gender-blending is also found in other forms: in some post-Purāṇic devotional sources Kṛṣṇa tells Rādhā that she is his *svarūpa*: his true form. Other deities shift gender: Viṣṇu is said in the *Mahābhārata*,

and in the *Padma*, *Bhāgavata* and *Brahmanda Purāṇas* to have incarnated as a beautiful woman. Female heroines and deities rarely acquire the masculine gender that would threaten existing social power structures, but they do take on male roles (as when Kālī is victorious over demons whom the gods could not defeat, or Pārvatī earns the admiration of Himalayan renouncers).

However the binarity of male and female is not adequate to describe the whole of Indian society. As Michel Foucault has noted in the Western context, the category of 'homosexual' is a recent and limiting imposition on societies that may have fashioned their own cultural accommodation for roles that lie beyond the male–female model. Serena Nanda and Gayatri Reddy have highlighted the communities of *hijras* that have existed in India at least since the Mughal period, bringing together men who adopt female roles, and female social as well as – often but not always – sexual practices (Nanda, 1998; Reddy, 2005). Specifically Hindu ideas are used to provide a social model, identity and spiritual legitimation for such communities, some of which follow the template of the *sampradāya*, envisioning the members as pupils following a guru (Nanda, 1998). Hijras have also become part of traditional marriage and birth celebrations, and are seen as having the power to bless or curse, sometimes claiming a *tapas*-like power derived from celibacy. The lack of a prominent discourse about sexual practices that lie beyond the reproductive poles of male and female, has arguably allowed a range of gender practices to take place in Hindu societies without attracting either celebration or censure.

Future directions lie in the search for new sources on women's lives, and a greater understanding of the basis of oppression in traditional societal sources, and of the impact that goddess traditions and feminine-gendered metaphysics have on women's lives. It has also become increasingly important to explore the complex range of gender identity and practice that exist within Hindu tradition: the real lives of Hindus through history have included a wider range of lifestyles than those described in the traditional models of husband and wife; earnest scholarship will seek to reveal the culture as it is experienced by those on the margins as well as those in the mainstream.

Local, Tantric and 'Caste' Hinduism

The literate, upper class, Sanskrit-speaking picture of Hinduism that was painted by early scholars still needs to be balanced by greater attention to the religious life and expression of non-literate or 'alternative' religious groups who have not been adequately represented: women and younger people, 'lower' castes, under-represented *jātis*, tribes and 'scheduled castes', non-Sanskrit-speaking peoples and Hindu religious traditions that stand beyond the margins of Vedic orthodoxy. The roots of Yoga, Tantra and even of Vedic traditions

remain a mystery, and the pre-urban story of India also remains to be told, as do the histories of important traditions in later Hindu culture such as ascetic practices, possession cults, local deities, tree-worship and other practices.

In contrast to traditions that emphasize a transcendent divinity attained through rejection of the material world, many of the alternative traditions in the subcontinent addressed divinity as something to be invited into the physical world through possession of persons, or sacralization of places and objects. It is the combination of transcendent and immanent approaches which characterizes many 'Bhakti' formulations of worship, and continues to influence popular Hinduism today. From this perspective an understanding of 'local', 'marginal' or 'alternative' traditions is essential to the picture of Hinduism as a whole.

Hindu mythology and iconography often retain stories that refer to the relation between pan-Hindu and local, Vedic and Tantric, pure and impure, temple and shrine-based religious traditions. In a story told in the *Śiva Purāṇa* and in the *Mahābhārata*, Śiva, whose Tantric practices make him an unattractive son-in-law, is excluded from a Vedic sacrifice held by his wife's father. But impure as he is, he subsequently takes control of the sacrifice himself using the previous sacrificers as the offering, suggesting the discomfort of brahminical clans and their royal patrons with Tantric practitioners, and the eventual integration of the two in a synthesis that is still found in many places. The identification of Murugan, the long-standing South Indian deity, with the Ṛg Vedic god Skanda reflects a process of north-south, Vedic-Dravidian synthesis that is also represented in the story of Murugan's two consorts, one of whom is seen as the daughter of a tribal chief to whom he is attracted despite his existing marriage. Some suggest that Kṛṣṇa's royal status in the *Mahābhārata* and *Harivaṃśa* is actually a reflection of his historical origins as a deified tribal chieftain, and the battle between Rāma and Rāvaṇa in the *Rāmāyaṇa* has also been seen as a contest between Vedic or Sanskritic kings and tribal or Dravidian chieftains. Local narrative forms retain local characteristics; performance of the folk-tales of Pabuji, Lalmon and Kṛṣṇa are embellished with region-specific cultural references in Rajasthan, Bengal and Gujarat respectively. This process of competition and convergence between universalized narratives and regional life continues today, as local traditions are only just beginning to be recorded and recognized, as they either dissolve or reassert themselves in the face of the pan-Sanskritic identity asserted by much of the Indian media.

Tantra, Possession and Shamanic Traditions

Tantra has been dealt with in greater detail by Dominic Goodall and Harunaga Isaacson in their essay in the present volume. Here it is important to note that Tantra's rise to prominence as a major topic both for research, and study is a

drastic turnaround from the pro-Vedic approach that has dominated in the past. The study of Tantra has prompted the realization that traditions seen as unorthodox and antinomian trends that lie outside the remit of the Vedic revelation considered by many to be the well-spring of Hinduism, and which are still today considered taboo among many Hindus, can in fact be intrinsic to mainstream aspects of Hindu worship. Most temple *pūjā* rituals today are largely Tantric in origin, as is the architecture of the temple itself. Further, Tantra increasingly appears to be a pan–South Asian religious framework within which Vedic brahminism was a localized micro-culture – a vision that is far from the earlier Western idea that Tantra is merely a marginal aberration from the 'high philosophy' of Vedānta. In short, the growing field of Tantric studies has, in many respects, turned the study of Hinduism on its head and forced scholars to reassess the accepted wisdoms of the past.

The 'Early Tantra' project, which unites scholars in Pondicherry, South India and in Hamburg, Germany, has been devoted to studying the transmissions and commonalities which characterized Tantra as a pan-Asian culture that included Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, Śākta, Saura and even Buddhist and Jain traditions. The research done by contributors to the project has shown the value of looking at broad religious trends across the Indian subcontinent and South Asia as a way of gaining contextual hermeneutic clues to the proper interpretation of the sources, and of identifying texts or practices that had previously been judged as isolated exceptions, as part of broader traditions that were authoritative within their own communities of reception.

In accounting for Tantra as an 'alternative' non-Vedic ingredient of Hindu cultures, scholars have had to delve into what might be called the 'shamanistic' features of Hinduism – that is those practices which advocate highly trained, disciplined control of the body, mind or ritual materials (through *yoga,* possession, ascetic trials or magical initiation) in order to invite and cultivate internal energies and external deities. These supernatural forces are in turn channelled into supernatural powers (*tapas*) that may or may not be soteriological in character. Yoga is one tradition that offered this path of disciplined cultivation and use of these 'magical' powers (*siddhis*) for one's own purposes. The acknowledgement that yoga is a discipline that can be aimed at strength, energy and practical power, has helped to resolve certain features that had seemed incongruous with the idea of yoga as a quietist path aimed solely at the highest soteriological goals of liberation or *mokṣa*. The long list of *siddhis* or supernatural powers that can be achieved in the *Yoga Sūtra*, highlights the way in which renouncers pursuing mokṣa may also have undergone a stage of seeking to heighten their *tapas*, or supernatural power. One sees this frequently in the epics and Purāṇas: characters practise yoga to achieve powers, to acquire boons from the deities, to acquire powerful *mantras* that can be used as weapons or even to acquire the ability to enter into and 'possess' other people (as did the female

ascetic Sulabha). One distinctive difference between local practices of austerities and yogic practices of the kind described in the *Yoga Sūtra*, is that austerities of the kind that are practiced at Keralan, Tamil and Sri Lankan festivals to Murugan are aimed at proving commitment to the god, emulating his virility and projecting oneself into heightened ecstatic states – they are not, as certain yogic traditions became, essentially gnostic practices aimed at liberating the mind from the influence of the body and its attachment to the material world. This is reflected in the fact that Tantric traditions may use physical substances such as blood or ash in their rituals.

In possession practices individuals may invite a deity to enter them, and can then give *darśan*, being worshipped as an image or *mūrti* of the deity itself. This is part of a long-standing trend that extends throughout South Asia, and offers a positive concept of possession that is the opposite of the 'negative, invasive' notion emphasized in the West in accordance with biblical portrayals (Trautmann, 1981; Smith, 2006). Possession is seen in a 'hot' form in the famous festival dances practised in Kerala – that is, it is practised by lower castes and associated with local goddesses who accept blood and are seen as capable of both curse and protection. Rich Freeman has suggested that such possession rituals influenced the rise of the popular Hindu worship of images in temples (Freeman in Flood, 2003, p. 307). They have come to play a mediatory function, linking the brahminic, temple and folk strands of Hindu practice (Freeman in Flood, 2003, pp. 307–26).

Possession may also have influenced the development of an ecstatic style of Bhakti religion by southern poets such as the Āḻvārs, and through later northern figures such as Caitanya (McDaniel, 1989), as it gradually became an important ingredient in northern devotional religious traditions that saw themselves as Vedic and brahminical in orientation. Classic Vaiṣṇava texts focusing on love reflect the influence of Tantric practices of possession and of gendered accumulation of energies through sexual activities; the *Gītagovinda,* which is now accepted as part of the liturgical canon of high Sanskrit literature, refers to Radha's breasts as *maṇḍalas*, Tantric symbols of power and the god of love as entering into and possessing the characters. Possessed mediums were also the sources of revelatory intellectual teachings: in the *Brhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, the character of Uddālaka makes reference to a woman who gave teachings when a Gandharva spirit entered her. Possession remains influential within the popular Indian imaginaire of ideas: Frederick Smith begins his study of possession practices in South Asia with reference to a popular Hindi film that concluded its happy ending with a case of a husband being possessed by a ghost who had fallen in love with his wife, following a Rajasthani folk tale. While the ending makes little sense for Western viewers, its logic fits well with the distinctly positive notion of possession that remains influential in the contemporary Hindu culture (Smith, 2006).

Local Traditions, Village Worship and Folk Deities

The vast majority of the Hindu population has been settled in rural villages for generations. This means that village traditions are an important part of the study of Hinduism. At the level of local communities and everyday life, Hinduism takes on local contours, adapting in ways that keep religion relevant to the cultural, economic and religious make-up of the community, and the experiences that are typical to them. This adaptation takes place at many levels of religion, including myth and religious narrative, deities, rituals and customs relating to caste or purity. The variety which results from this context-specific adaptation demonstrates the way in which Hindu universalism relates to what anthropologist Ernest Gellner calls the 'particularism' of religion on the ground (Gellner, 1981). It also reveals a dual structure of Hindu religiosity: mainstream and local traditions mirror each other, by assimilating local deities into wider families or narratives, or by including local sites within wide-scale pilgrimage circuits, and sometimes in more concrete ways as when the same deity is worshipped with pure substances in a temple, and impure substances in a separate shrine nearby.

In the 'looking glass' world of local traditions, lower castes and women may be the main ritual specialists, and high deities are worshipped alongside smaller local deities (*grama devatās*), nature spirits, demons (*rakṣas*), ancestors and ghosts (*bhūtas*). The grand architectures of temples are replaced by shrines that mark the sanctity of stones, trees, pools and rivers and mountains at sites spread across the landscape. At the local level Hindu culture often resembles animistic religions such as Shinto more closely than Abrahamic traditions such as Christianity. Stephen Huyler writes that, as distinct from the discrete personalities of the high gods, local deities can become synonymous with the whole locale, incorporating both the physical place and the human and animal communities, as well as the past as encapsulated in local ghosts and ancestors (Stephen Huyler, 1999, p. 102). This structure is altering however, as mass-media and improved transport make it possible for India and its diaspora to develop a single shared pan-Hindu culture to a greater degree.

Narratives about local deities are an important way in which Hinduism comes to reflect the lives of the community. Epics composed in the Thar desert of Rajasthan feature typical Rajasthani characters such as camel traders, while a Tamil version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* depicts the Sri-Lankan figure of Rāvaṇa, seen as a many-headed demon in the northern Vālmikī version, as the erudite and handsome hero. The worship of localized deities are often 'adopted' by the Sanskritic tradition, as versions or relations of the pan-Hindu deities: local and pan-Hindu deities may be identified with each other, identified as manifestations or *avatārs* of each other, or married to each other, demonstrating the striking fluidity of the Hindu pantheon. Local holy men may be seen as a manifestation

of a part of Kṛṣṇa, village goddesses identified with particular clans in the local community, or local chiefs and revered ancestors be overlaid on Purāṇic deities who are familiar throughout the continent, with names being altered as they are carried over from one shrine to another nearby.

McKim Marriott's 1955 study of the 'little communities' of village India documented this process by which village traditions exist in a loose connection with the 'great-tradition' of popular Hinduism, adopting and adapting pan-Hindu texts, rituals and narratives in a localized and creative way. Referring to the village that was the focus of his fieldwork he writes that:

> Between the festivals of Kishan Garhi and those sanctioned by the great tradition, connections are often loosened, confused, or mistaken because of a multiplicity of competing meanings for each special day within the great tradition itself . . . Accustomed to an interminable variety of overlapping Sanskritic mythology, villagers have ceased to be much concerned with distinguishing the 'right' great-traditional explanation of a festival from such sanskritic sounding and possibly newly invented ones as may be convenient. (McKim Marriott, 1955, pp. 194–5)

Marriott's observation about the loose connections between village and pan-Indian festivals also applies to other religious features such as deities, stories and rituals. The village tradition is rarely totally distinct from mainstream Hinduism. As Sontheimer points out, 'folk religion does not explain itself', and it may be the case that theological elements found in Sanskrit texts existed at the level of worship long before they were articulated in the terms in which we now study them, couched in Vedic terminology and the Purāṇic pantheon (Sontheimer in Eck and Mallinson, 1991, p. 21).

One of the distinctive features of Hinduism lies in its postulation of a striking intimacy between humanity and the divine. Yet one of the differences between the local traditions and those articulated with reference to the Veda and Vedānta, is that for the former, intimacy is premised on the idea that divinity lies on a continuum of beings which includes the gods who are the 'heads of families' (e.g. Viṣṇu, Śiva, Kālī and Durgā), their children and consorts, and also local manifestation of these deities, smaller gods, spirits of the trees and animals, and also human ancestors such as clan or caste deities, *kula-devatā*, and actual and imagined ancestors and human manifestations as well as temporarily 'possessed' mediums. The world of village Hinduism is a full community tightly interwoven with social relationships that are integral to the 'multifarious activities essential for day-to-day living' (Srinivas, 1976, p. 329). Srinivas suggests that village Hinduism offers a conception of theism that is very different from the assumed 'monotheism' of Abrahamic religions, or the non-dualism of Vedānta (Srinivas, 1976, p. 329). In the local context 'union' with the god is

understood in terms of possession as well as *mokṣa*, preserving the personal identity that is required for functional life within the community of family and social relations; an identity generally rejected by those who pursue the renunciatory ideal that govern Vedāntic ideals of union.

Caste, Varṇa, Jati and Kula

Caste is a concept that is widely known but little understood, and corresponds only partially to the realities of Indian society. From the early confidence of British colonial administrators that they had identified a four-fold system of 'caste' as the principle of order underlying India's complex society, to the later interest of scholars such as Louis Dumont and Jan Heesterman in discovering the rationale behind the system as described in the Vedas, caste has been perceived as the key to understanding Indian society. In the last decades however, scholars have sought increasingly subtle classifications, and even alternative models to the traditional notion of caste. Such models aim to provide a better reflection of the many forces that determine the place of the individual in society, from family and clan, to village and region, class, profession, wealth and purity.

Indian society is filled with a range of more and less hierarchical divisions and subdivisions, some of which are endogamously based on birth, others of which relate to one's financial, social or ritual status in society, or to historical relations between different communities. In particular, the reinforcement of such divisions may be seen at the level of a specific person's ritual purity, which governs patterns of everyday physical interaction with other members of society. This depends on the juxtaposition of two types of factor: one's *innate* ritual purity based on parentage and membership of one or more kinship groups called *jātis* or *kulas*, with *acquired* ritual purity resulting from lifestyle, profession, or through circumstances such as family death, childbirth, menstruation or travel to other cultures. 'Caste' is a word coined by early Portuguese visitors to India to refer to the hierarchical structures they observed in indigenous culture. Scholars searching in texts for the phenomenon that corresponded to these observations found pervasive references in Sanskrit texts to a categorization of humans into four *varṇas*, or colour-coded categorizations of society into *brahmin* or priest, *kṣatriya* or ruling class, *vaiṣya* or merchant and *śūdra* or labourer. This varna system was first described in a myth of human origins in the *Puruṣa Sūkta* of the *Ṛg Veda*, and subsequently explained and used to categorize people in the epics and to recommend normative behaviour for each group in texts of ethics and law such as the Dharma Śāstras and the *Viṣṇu Smṛti*. These references demonstrate that the idea of the *varṇas* was a major ideology in the sectors of society engaged in Sanskrit textual traditions. Western sources took up this simple scheme as a core structure of Hindu society; British authorities operated with

the notion of *varṇa*, and Louis Dumont's thought-provoking and illuminating study of the power structures that animate the *varṇas*, promoted it to the centre of scholarly discourse, while Heesterman's critical response added to the debate and posed puzzles about the relation of brahmin and *kṣatriya* that inspired much subsequent scholarship (Dumont, 1970; Heesterman, 1985).

However scholars are now realizing that in reality caste designations 'have histories of change and conflict, ragged edges and ambiguities which reflect the politics of the day', and new ways of understanding Indian social structures are emerging (Gordon, 1994, p. x). The *varṇas* are increasingly seen primarily as an idealized, broad framework for summarizing social divisions. The notion of *jāti*, which is more widely understood and used in society itself, is based in the complexities of reality and thus may stand within *varṇa* categories, straddle them or have no place in that system. Indeed, many Hindus are unclear about the *varṇa* to which their *jāti* might correspond, and many *jāti*s have a mixed and disputed history of affiliation to the classical categories. It may be the case that *varṇas* do not describe reality (and never did), but rather are a wholly hermeneutical construct. Thus Flood translates *varṇa* as class, reflecting their classificatory function, while it is *jāti* that he translates as caste (Flood, 1996, p. 58). *Varṇas* are themselves intrinsically complicated categories: the brahmin who performs the ritual function which is his defining feature, may be seen as defiled by his acceptance of gifts of payment from lower groups (Fuller, 1984, p. 50; Parry, 1980). The brahmin who does not fulfil his fundamental function is thus higher than one who does. These and other conundrums have been raised, inviting further study of the ideas that complicate the apparently simple and ideal *varṇa* system. *Varṇas* do continue to govern certain patterns of relationship within society however: there are few *kṣatriyas*, or kings as such in Hindu societies. But in every community there are dominant or governmental classes which may function in the ways that are associated with the *kṣatriya* – acting, for instance, as the patron of local rituals or temples (Hocart, 1936; Raheja, 1988). In other contexts brahmins may be absent from a village or region, or out of the orbit of some sections of the community; nevertheless other groups can take on the role of religious mediator, ritual officiant or primary point of access to the sacred.

Jāti birth categories associate families with particular professions or religious affiliations. Rather than broad divisions of labour as in the *varṇas*, these may be wholly local professions that are relevant to a particular sub-culture, region or village. Accordingly, most if not all *jātis* are essentially local rather than pan-Hindu, relating to particular communities, although they have analogies with similar *jātis* in other communities. A surname may reflect a *jāti*, just as the English 'Smith' (blacksmith), 'Wright' (wheelwright) and 'Taylor' (Tailor) also designate a traditional familial occupation. Similarly, the family group may have moved away from the previous *jāti* through a change in trade, location,

class status or general socio-economic shifts. Members of a *jāti* may intentionally lay claim to a higher status by 'organisation and propaganda' (Hutton, 1963, p. 98): changing its name, altering its behaviour or actual trade, or claiming descent to other human or even divine families. A new status will result which must be squared with the traditional status, with the result that a range of professions may be combined in a single *jāti*. In other cases a *jāti* will become consolidated as a fixed group in a community, with its own subculture, practices and institutions, not unlike a 'guild'. *Jātis* often split, through migration, disagreement or inter-marriage, resulting in an ever-proliferating range. They can also become merged into a single larger group – diaspora communities have sometimes undergone this process in new societies where differences have less significance. In many cases, the common social mechanisms that reinforce *jātis*, and also manifest their hierarchical characteristics, are the practices of dining and marrying. A *jāti* may be reluctant to associate with groups considered 'lower' because of their purity status, their varṇa classification, feudal relations of land-ownership and employment or simply tradition. *Jātis* are both endogamous and flexible, and unlike the popular notion of caste may or may not adhere to a strict hierarchical system. In the case of *jāti* inter-marriage, Manu opposes such association but notes that such a marriage goes 'with the grain' if it is a higher-status male who takes a lower-status female. This view is reflected in folk tales and stories of gods who take lower caste or tribal women as their consorts, suggesting that this was a known phenomenon.

Scholars have pointed out that the classification into *jāti*, literally meaning 'birth', 'species' or 'genus', can be used for a wide range of beings, including humans, animals and supernatural persons. As such it connotes a descriptive designation of what they essentially are. Thus the concept is not merely a social, but also a biological or metaphysical category: everything by nature acts in accordance with its *jāti*. When cross-referenced, *jātis* and *varṇas* provide natural and social criteria for classification, within which human activity can be mapped. Accordingly, it is interesting to note that it is not an exclusively Hindu phenomenon; Muslim, Christian and other religious communities settling in India have acquired their own often unofficial 'caste' structures. In each caste comes to signify the social, relational identity of persons within the structure of each local community, while also providing a means for people in different regions or cultures to 'place' each other, and interact as part of a larger community.

Increasingly it is becoming clear that the system known as the caste system less resembles an endogamous classification of trades, than a complex 'clan-based' or 'tribal' culture – understanding 'tribe' in the literal sense of a familial group that has come to encompass extended family and even those who are associated by business, marriage, political alliance or geographical co-habitation, to form a linked group that claims a shared history or traditional affiliation.

Professions within a *jāti* may vary, but the sense of a linked familial history, hailing from a village or community if not a single ancestor is pervasive. Accordingly, *kula*, meaning 'local kinship group' or 'clan', and *gotra*, referring to a more specific (and usually brahminical) ancestral link, are now understood to be important terms in Hindu Studies. Precolonial law was often administrated according to the customs of a person's *kula*, such that the *kula* was seen as more than a mere family or trade, but rather like a guild, possessing legal and administrative powers (Thaplyal, 1996). A local dispute could be settled by a *gotra-gaṅga*, the river-like gathering of many ancestral lines in a single clan- or caste-tribunal that would settle issues such as the purification and re-admittance of a wayward member (O'Hanlon, 2009, p. 55). In many contexts there would have been a fine line between clan patriarchs, tribal chiefs and local kings; a 'clan'-type of social structure is clearly at work in the different opposing groups of the *Mahābhārata*, and there Kṛṣṇa himself is referred to as a chieftain.

Such designations indicate that Indian society does not follow a single simple system of hierarchical caste, but rather a complex matrix of different systems that have varied forms of influence over a person's law and custom, lifestyle and purity, community and only sometimes profession. An individual stands at the intersection of these many factors, and thus social status is necessarily localized. This is manifested in the filters of religious worship through which a Hindu might worship a *kula-devatā*, who is usually a familial ancestor, a grāma-devatā, who is the local village deity or spirit and an *iṣṭa-devatā*, who is the personally chosen deity to whom devotion is accorded. This combination reflects only some of the identities, both social and religious that determine 'Hindu identity'.

Future directions for the study of Tantric, local and 'caste' traditions lie in the continued discovery of material illuminating this localized yet popular dimension of Hindu cultures. Such study will require the skills of anthropologists, sociologists and those who can read the visual and oral texts through which these religious forms are expressed. The nature and relation of different forms of the sacred in Hindu cultures remains ill-conceptualized after more than a century of study. Similarly, the subtle matrix of different forms of social order needs to be better mapped out and a model clearly drawn, taking into account the local as well as the universalizing dimensions of what has hitherto been called 'caste'. It has also become necessary for scholars to clarify the historical links between popular tradition and that which has been disseminated in the major Hindu textual traditions. Without understanding the relations between the two, current views of Hinduism will continue to be fragmented, and those aiming to defend the coherence of Hindu tradition will continue to see non-Vedic, unwritten and sometimes non-brahminical and 'unpure' traditions as marginal, regardless of their age and popularity.

Place, Politics and Diaspora

Physical locations are important in a number of ways in popular Hindu modes of engaging with the sacred. Hindu cosmology includes provision for points at which the sacred becomes more immediately accessible than in other places. This may be understood as a 'breaking through', or as a place in which the divine saturates the physical world to a higher degree, or merely as a place in which, for various reasons to do with the awareness of the observer or the grace of a deity, the divine is simply more easily recognized. Such places are often called a *tīrṭha*, or 'ford', indicating that it is a point at which one may cross over from the mundane to the sacred.

Local sacred spaces such as shrines and temples form the basis of local spirituality. The shrine, whether it stands alone and unsheltered as part of the social and geographical landscape, or is sheltered within the public display space of the temple, all establish a direct link between a particular place and local divine manifestations; as such a sacred space 'underscores the local and regional contexts of religious traditions' (Ray, 2009, p. 76). Yet such spaces are connected in a network of pilgrimage circuits (*tīrṭhayātrā*) that describe the larger religious space in which Hinduism exists. Such religious notions of place as sacred have come to intersect with modern notions of kingdom, political nation or cultural 'homeland' (*swadesh*) in ways that affect Hindu identity. As a result the intersection of these ideologies of place has had a powerful influence on both political events and diasporic communities.

Temple, City, Shrine and Pilgrimage

The temple has been studied in many contexts – as an expression of political imagery for instance, acting as royal propaganda for the kings who commissioned it (Hardy, 2007), or as a cultural-economic intersection of artisanal traditions, reflecting the skills, resources and professional relationships of the community (Misra, 2009), and as an embodiment of particular devotional theologies, illustrating ideas through sculpture and ornament, and creating the appropriate atmosphere (Michell, 1988; Hudson, 2008). Temples are not only spaces for communal worship containing shrines that are the designated houses of the god or goddess. They are themselves conceived as having cosmological significance, as each temple is elevated to the plane of the sacred through the auspicious principles of temple design laid out in the Vāstu Śāstras, texts describing the proper architectural planning for dwellings, temples and cities. The temple is a small world in which people, both human and divine may live, eat and interact – but according to sacralized patterns, rather than the volatile chaos of the world. In this way it provides a localized fulfilment of the Vedic

aspiration to a world ordered by *ṛta*. The local site of the temple is related in various ways to the broader landscape. Through the concordance with the points of the compass and with astrological positions, Vāstu Sastric layout also tends to orient human structures to the cardinal points and the landscape around them, establishing an actual as well as symbolic connection to the broader geography. In diaspora contexts, temples can perform this trans-local linking function at the level of community as well as cosmology, providing a place for people from different areas and backgrounds to gather as a single group. Temples contribute to the coherence of communities which are otherwise disparate, and they can also create a sense of connection to India itself for those diaspora Hindus who are uncertain of how sacred geography operates in a nominally Christian, Muslim, Buddhist or secular country.

The experience of physical space as a sacred, ordered cosmos applies to cities as well as to temples. Jaipur, the eighteenth-century Rajput capital of Rajasthan, was one of the first cities to be explicitly built according to the principles of Vāstu Śāstra, with carefully apportioned sections for different trades. Often Hindu constructions take the form of a *maṇḍala* – a shape which always represents (beside other meanings) the universe. Robert Levy has argued that a Hindu city built according to such principles becomes more than an urban space: it becomes 'Hinduism in an urban incarnation', much as cathedrals are shaped according to Christian ideas and history, but also aim to present Christianity to the public (Parish, 1997, p. 443). Levy takes Nepal as a continuously Hindu culture and landscape, unaffected by colonial intervention (as Lecomte-Tilouine does in the present volume), and uses it to highlight the distinctive Hindu conception of every city as a 'mesocosm': a space that actualizes Hindu values, making it possible to live in an ideal earthly realm that brings humans close to sacred beings and values. It is specifically the *ordered* universe (cosmos rather than chaos) that is represented in these 'Hindu' spaces, demonstrating the place of notions of 'civilization' and human structuring implicit in sacred architectural and urban planning. As tales in the Brāhmaṇas, epics, Purāṇas and other literature show, the forest was seen, by contrast, as the unstructured space of competing societies of demons, tribes and unruly ascetics. It is in the forest that Rāma loses his wife and to the forest that the Pāṇḍavas go when they have lost their kingdom, leaving behind the order both of political rule and urban life.

Open or outdoor shrines act as an alternative point of access. They are usually devoted to local female deities who accept blood-sacrifice, and are associated with local sites, stories and clans or caste groups. Such village shrines do not have the formal situation of temples, rather they often take their cue from features of the landscape such as notable local stones, trees or wells, and the boundaries between the shrine space and the village may be more permeable than those of the local temples which have a clearly defined precinct. Similarly

the portrayal of the deity takes a different abstract and iconic form, often as a stone on a plinth in front of a tree circled by a wall. One may see a relation to village icons in the stone obelisk of the Śaiva liṅgam or the abstract wooden form of the Orissan Jagganāth form of Kṛṣṇa. This abstract, natural form of representation has a symbolic significance. Rather than *sacralizing* the landscape like a temple built upon it or a god who has visited it, the shrine *derives* its sanctity from the immediate geographical landscape and its specific history of divine or human inhabitants. Shrines reflect rural villagers' sense that they have a direct physical connection to the specific land on which they live, taking in what it produces so that the land literally becomes part of them (Daniel, 1984, p. 85). They develop a commensurate relationship with the local deities or spirits. As we have seen, some such deities or spirits may be ancestors of the present inhabitants, linking communities with the location, especially as such ancestral shrines are not generally meant to be moved. In many communities the calendar of daily offerings and annual festivals means that Hindu lives are lived alongside those of the local deities in their midst. The resulting 'large' community includes not only humans but a range of supernatural beings including the deities of the temples, who take local forms at local sites such as the Jagganāth form of Kṛṣṇa at Puri or the Mīnākṣī form of the Goddess at Madurai, and also the local spirits and ancestors.

Pilgrimage spaces have recently become a subject for prolific study (e.g. Eck, 1982 and Parry, 1994 on the Ganges; Nandan, 2002 on the Kumbh Mela; Misra, 1999 and Khanna, 2003 on Pushkar; Naidu, 1992 on Tirupati; Hawley, 1981 and Haberman, 1994 on the region of Braj or Vrindavan; Gold, 1988 on Rajasthani pilgrimages; Stanley, 1992 and Feldhaus, 1995 on Maharashtrian pilgrimages; Sax, 1991 on Himalayan pilgrimages). They offer both a focus for Hindu belief and practice, and a microcosm of the wide range of social and theological groups who meet at the pilgrimage site. It has been noted that *tīrṭhayātrā*, or pilgrimages around a number of sacred places, bring together a large cross-section of Hindus, yet they typically also project them into a 'liminal' space in which the normal rituals, social divisions and rules of purity may not operate in the usual way. Thus pilgrimages offer a form of space that, rather than confirming the socio-religious order as in the urban *maṇḍala*, instead breaks down the normal social rules (see Daniel, 1984; Sekar, 1992). Here the sacred is associated with an otherworldly order that transcends the mundane structures of *varṇa*, *kula* and gendered *dharma* that operates in settled life. Pilgrimages were often connected with each other into pilgrimage circuits that (as in Europe) formed an important framework for understanding different regions and the connections between them. When connected together in the imagination, such pilgrimages map out a wider framework of religious geography within which Hindus could locate their own regional and religious identity. The study of pilgrimage has expanded scholarly focus beyond the divine as characterized solely by

anthropomorphic and metaphysical concepts, towards an 'embodied' understanding of the divine as something that can come to manifestation in a range of concrete forms of presence including landscape and the structure of space itself.

Pilgrimage spaces acquire their significance from an underlying ascription of sanctity to certain kinds of geographical features. Rivers, for instance, are able to wash away both ritual impurities and sins, and may also be associated with localized female river goddesses, or with the activities of a particular god described in a *Sthala Purāṇa*, or pilgrimage story, as the Ganges is associated with Śiva, and Pushkar with Brahma. Often, sacred spaces combine the sanctity of physical proximity to water, hills and mountains, stones and trees, with that bestowed by a connection to myth, as demonstrated by sites associated with places visited or inhabited by a god (e.g. Kṛṣṇa's youthful home at Vṛndāvana, Brahma's performance of a ritual in Pushkar, Rāma's birthplace at Ayodhya or Satī's dismembered scattering across India at the Śakti *Pīthas*). Interestingly, outside of India, physical geography may not be adequate to establish sanctity – when new temples were built in Atlanta and Pittsburgh, the water from local rivers had to be mixed and 'sanctified' with water from the Gaṅgā and Kaverī rivers before it could be used to consecrate the temples (Narayanan in Mittal, 3004, p. 477). For some there is thus a link between the sacred space of the *tīrṭha,* and the specific historical geography of India.

Place and Political Identity

The importance of geography is also seen in the association of particular territories with particular religious and political identities. On this model, reflecting Emile Durkheim's notion of religious ideas as uniting a particular community, places become a touchstone of communal identity rather than merely a space in which to live. This view has a long history; Dravidian and Sanskrit languages have long been associated with different and sometimes competing religious, cultural and ethnic heritages. The epics and Purāṇas frequently mention specific geographical locations, anchoring their divine narratives in the geographical experience of Hindus, and also staking a claim to certain sites by affiliating them with particular deities or theological orientations. However sites gradually became contested according to a new sense that distinctly non-Indian 'others' were inhabiting the landscape, and religious claims to the landscape have taken on a new and specifically political significance in the modern periods of Islamic and European control and Hindu nationalism.

Sumathi Ramaswamy has undertaken a detailed history, using both textual and visual sources, of the shift in the way landscape was envisioned through the transition from wholly indigenous to European ways of conceiving territory

(Ramaswamy, 2003, pp. 151–89). She charts a pattern according to which earlier conceptions of territory as the abode of many individuals and communities, both human and otherwise, came to be seen as an impersonal physical object – land as depicted in geo-political maps and in the physical body of the globe. She suggests that 'the modern map enables the citizen-subject to take "visual and conceptual possession" of the nation-space that he inhabits', in such a way that earlier notions of space as a framework for human and divine action, were transformed into conceptual reifications of cultural identity, and political sites of communal property (Ramaswamy, 2003, p. 152). India as a space accommodating Hindu human experiences, became India as the property of Hindus.

The reformers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were instrumental in the project of trying to conceive of what a global Hinduism might look like. At the time much British policy sought to categorize and divide Indian communities, in order to better understand and rule them. This division actually consisted in labelling individual ethnicities, tribes, castes and of course states; whole tribes could be designated as 'martial' like the Gurkhas, or disregarded as 'criminal', like the Marathi Bhils. In contrast to this approach, reformers sought a unifying ethos. Swami Vivekananda, whose presentation at the 1893 Chicago Parliament of World Religions was enormously influential on the ways in which Hinduism would thereafter be viewed in the West, presented Hinduism as an abstract philosophy that was distinctly 'Indian', but divorced of its ethnic, linguistic or geographical associations. The first line of his address, 'Sisters and brothers of America', established a new global conception of Hindu identity, commensurate with his reference to the Israelite and Zoroastrian refugees 'sheltered' by India. In his lectures his emphasis was on the universal nature of the soul rather than on particular deities with all of the culture-specific detail that attends their depiction and worship. Subsequent writers such as Gandhi, Subash Chandra Bose, Tagore and Sri Aurobindo took much inspiration from him in forming their own conceptions of Indian culture as offering a coherent, globally applicable philosophy. Gandhi advised Indians to live on the produce of their land, but this was less an expression of connection to the soil as a cultural touchstone, than an economic strategy for attaining local independence from the control mechanisms of ruling classes. Even Dayananda Saraswatī, the reformer who had most emphatically stressed an indigenous Indian identity identified specifically with the Vedas, portrayed Sanskrit and 'Aryan' culture as a universal revelation originally 'meant for all countries', claiming that northern India had been empty before the Aryans descended from Tibet and chose that territory as a home.

With independence, the development of 'nationalist' ideologies encouraged a religious attachment to the territory of India as a distinctively *Hindu* political entity. Having underestimated the impact of the riots in Ayodhya in the first 1992 edition of his study of popular Hinduism, C. J. Fuller charts 'Hindu

nationalism's impact on ordinary people's religion' in his second 2004 edition, noting the gradual processes by which nationalist rhetorics came to pervade the popular consciousness (Fuller, 2004, p. 263). Bal Gaṅgadhar Tilak's channelling of anti-Muslim, anti-British Marathi pride into an expanded version of the Gaṇeśa Chaturthi festival in Pune during the last years of the nineteenth century, led the way for the Shiv Sena Hindu nationalist group to promote Maharashtran identity as distinctively Hindu. Fuller suggests that such protests, worship events and festivals (all three are often merged into a single event) are calculated not only to assert a right of independent rule and unrestrained cultural expression, but also to highlight Hindu identity and 'display it physically through ubiquitous Hindu control over the streets and other spaces' (Fuller, 204, p. 265). The VHP's later development in the mid-eighties of national processions that combined political protest with religious pilgrimage, culminated in 1990 in the leader of the BHP riding the lead chariot while carrying a bow in the pose of Rāma himself, and supported by a group of young militants who called themselves 'Hanuman's army'.

In the late eighties Rāma had been promoted as a pan-Indian deity in a popular television series that brought the nation to empathize with his struggle to return to righteous government. This paved the way for the unique revival of political claims and religious heritage in the Ayodhya dispute that is often seen as a turning point in the development of late modern Hindu nationalism. In 1992 a mosque that had been built by the Muslim Emperor Babur on the site of a destroyed temple, was contested by Hindus who believed that it is the birthplace of Rāma, and wanted to build a commemorative temple there. Through a combination of legal argument and political incitement, the dispute led to rioting and a large number of deaths. The VHP linked the dispute to the ideal of Rāma's rightful and righteous rule, by encouraging Hindus to send consecrated bricks to the site to be used in the reconstruction of 'Rāma's temple. Here a very active sense of taking possession of the land was expressed in a context that was both explicitly devotional, and explicitly political. The 'spatial strategies' of public protests (Deshpande, 2004), and the materiality of the soil itself, had the twofold effect of giving a concrete embodiment to the 'Hindu' histories that had taken place upon it, and concrete expression to the notion of Hinduism as nation.

This ideological connection between Indian land and Hindu religion has perhaps been most thoroughly studied in the form of 'Bharat Mata', the image of the Hindu goddess as one with the land of India itself; constituting the land like Sāṃkhya's feminine notion of *prakṛti*, nurturing it like Lakṣmī, goddess of wealth and protecting it like Durgā, the warrior goddess. Poster images of Bharat Mata as a goddess standing astride India, or as a goddess in the shape that India takes on the political map, were widely used to identify the country according to its political boundaries as not only Hindu by possession, but

Hindu by divine identity (McKean, in Hawley et al., 1996). In such images the whole nation became a manifestation of the divine. In the hands of independence groups and VHP orators, political martyrs were portrayed as offering up their own blood as a sacrifice to the goddess.

The development of a modern political sensibility also paved the way for Hindus to view land as an exclusive possession. With the legal infrastructure introduced by the British, land came to be understood as 'belonging' to certain people in a new sense, drawing on a notion of property that is almost covenant-like in its contractual exclusivity, supported by authoritative juridical rulings on land-rights. In a process not unlike the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century enclosure of British 'common land', in India places came to be seen as agonistic sites of exclusive religious possession, whereas previously, multiple groups could have inhabited and belonged to that same territory. As Dilip Chakrabarti notes, at sites similar to Ayodhya where Muslim emperors had destroyed temples to build a mosque, new temples were rebuilt *next to* the mosque, and life went on as before with the two communities sharing the site (Chakrabarti, 2003, p. 202). In the case of the dispute that led to the riots in 1992, the situation became charged with political resonances and religious rhetoric from both sides, and was seen as a testing point on the government's treatment of Hindus and Muslims in India as a whole. In Ayodhya it was felt that only one group could religiously 'own' the site.

Christophe Jaffrelot has noted that most such movements have drawn on Sanskritic texts, deities and festivals (see Froehrer, 2002), emphasizing brahmin or kṣatriya identity, while nevertheless recruiting extensively among those who are considered lower castes (Jaffrelot, 2002). In this way the 'Sanskritization' process has continued in new forms in the modern period, taking advantage of a new kind of public space created by democratic nationhood and the widespread audiences of journalism, printed art and literature, television and film. India is no longer only a physical place or a cultural idea; it has become an intangible sphere of public media in which some of the most important battles for territory are now waged and won.

Hindu Diaspora

Inevitably the significance of place has altered with the movement of the Hindu diaspora out of the Indian subcontinent itself. Scholars have explored the very different new forms taken by Hindu belief and practice in the diverse cultural territories of South and East Africa, Indonesia and other parts of South East Asia (Arasaratnam, 1979), the West Indies, North America, Britain (Ballard, 1994; Burghart, 1987; Bhachu, P., 1985; Hole, 2005), a growing range of countries in Europe (Baumann in Haar, 1998), Australia and other areas around the world.

One of the most important phenomena observed in the transition from *settled*, to *migrant*, to *diaspora* community, is the process through which the elements of the old religious culture are sifted and sorted in order to choose the building blocks for the new Hindu community. These processes include a degree of self-reflection that is prompted by the threat of social exclusion by the 'host' culture on the one hand, of total assimilation on the other, and by the need for successful Hindu diaspora communities who manage to steer between these two poles, to explain themselves to their neighbours. The 'growing self-awareness of one's religious belonging' that results (Baumann in Rukmani, 1999, p. 67), can entail a process of prioritization that forces Hindus to evaluate their own religious life and decide which aspects are essential and which can be modified or even discarded. In many cases it also means deciding what should be newly adopted in the host country that had been ignored in the native context, thus certain aspects of Hinduism become reasserted in stronger forms.

At a more creative level, Hindus have had to find ways either to link themselves to India, or alternatively to establish a new cultural core in the host country. Links may take the form of the continued use of languages, lifestyle markers such as dress or diet and connections through trade, travel or marriage. In Mauritius, where the population is approximately one-third Hindu, the thriving Hindu culture has found its own defining structures, frequently drawn not from specifically religious features but rather from social markers such as the speaking of Hindi as an 'ancestral' language, through which a 'little India' is maintained (Eisenlohr, 2007). Alternatively, new Hindu 'centres' of a more formal kind may be created through the establishment of physical institutions (temples) or administrative institutions (cultural societies, temple committees, etc.). This is a pattern that has been very popular in England (Hole, 2005) and North America where institutional representation is an important feature of the host societies. Swaminarayan monks, for instance, present an institutionalized form of the culture of the wandering *sādhu*, or devoted ascetic, which having been formed under colonial conditions, is well suited to life in a non-Hindu environment. Many are glad of this new, tougher internationalized form of Hinduism which has the infrastructure and self-awareness to thrive in an ignorant or even hostile climate. Similarly many Hindus are glad of the Hare Kṛṣṇa and Swaminarayan temples that were built in London, although in many such stories of successful diasporic continuation the religious form inevitably displays distinct differences from its Indian precursor.

In some cases new centres may also function implicitly as a connection to India. Hole suggests that the Gujarati temple that she studied in Coventry is seen by its attendees as a sort of embassy: 'just like an embassy shelters its national citizens, and their values, they also consider the vicinity not as a *representation* of the native country, but *as* the native country' (Hole, 2005, p. 210). The UK Jalaram community favours the personal, charismatic spirituality of

'spontaneous miracles' at their gatherings and dinners, favouring not the 'high' Hinduism of temple ritual, nor the disciplined elite spirituality of the monk, but rather the religious touchstone of miracles 'spoken of freely and without concern', illustrating 'the continuity of the distinctively regional, vernacular tradition in the UK' (Wood, 2010, p. 248). Yet it maintains a more concrete link to Gujarat as the location of origin, through its assertion that the founder, a pious saint known as Jalaram Bapa who worked miracles for the good of his community, continues to do so in the UK. Undaunted by oceans and continents, the upwelling of the divine in the person of the saint provides an apt medium for travelling communities. Similarly the Shirdi and Sathya Sai Baba movements are able to transcend the need for a sense of 'return' to India as an authentic touchstone of the sacred, insofar as the person of the saint (or for some *avatār*) is able himself to move physically and spiritually through geographical space to dispense blessing throughout his community of devotion.

In each case a different priority has been implicitly declared in the selective creation/recreation of Hinduism in a new context. Steve Vertovec emphasizes this creative, transformative dimension and makes a plea for an affirmation of diaspora Hinduism not as a copy, corruption or creolization, but rather as a new form of authentic Hinduism. He even suggests a detailed matrix of criteria that can allow scholars to chart the many factors that dictate the form such change takes, from the migrant communities' reasons for migration, type of native and host culture, mobility, homogeneity, and caste and class, to the degrees of political representation, ethnic racism and pluralism that greet them in the new context (Vertovec, 2000, pp. 21–3). These are parameters that could be applied to the analysis of any development of a new Hindu culture in a new context, from the arrival of southern Indians in the Mughal north, to the experiences of Tantric migrants from the north in medieval Bengal and Orissa. In this perspective one can see diaspora studies as a lens that brings to light the micro-processes of adaptation and transformation that have previously gone on in India, now around the world and which have led Hinduism to acquire its present complexity.

Finally, a different form of diaspora Hinduism was established by those who, inspired by Hindu ideas, practices or traditions, set up fresh movements in new cultures. Swami Prabhupada and the International Society for Kṛṣṇa Consciousness (known as 'Iskcon'), Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and Transcendental Meditation, Bhagvan Shri Rajneesh, Prem Rawat and Elan Vital, Sathya Sai Baba, the Brahma Kumaris, Jiddu Kṛṣṇamūrti and others have all been influential in establishing forms of international Hinduism that are particularly popular outside of India, in some cases exclusively so. Some such groups have integrated with the local immigrant Hindu populations (as is the case with regard to the Iskcon community in the UK), although others have been perceived as presenting a religious form that intentionally stays culturally and ethnically

very separate from the Hinduism of Indian and Indian diaspora Hindus. Iskcon presents an interesting case study in its combination of a claim to continuity with the traditional Caitanya Vaiṣṇava sampradāya, with an emphasis on indigenously popular Hindu practices such as image worship (*mūrti-pūjā*), singing (*bhajans*), recitation (*japa-mālā*), as well as on tradition lifestyle elements of festival, diet and dress. The result is a community of international derivation that nevertheless has many of the cultural characteristics of indigenous forms of Hinduism.

Future studies of place will reveal new ways in which Hindus have engaged with the locations in which they live, expressing new forms of localized engagement with the divine or with the lives and events that have taken place in those spaces. Academic case studies can contribute to a localized and particularized picture of Hindu life, that provides a counterpoint to the reductive generality required by any 'national identity'. Local sites, with their own local histories, can be spaces within which memories, myths and hagiographic narratives tell of more ambiguous, particularistic, liminal communal identities rooted in the mutual recognition of sacred space. One village in Andhra Pradesh, for instance, experiences the Shi'ite festival of Muharram as a communal event in which tales are told of a local holy figure who is both revered as a saint by Muslims, and worshipped as a deity by Hindus (Mohammad, 2010). The localization of this tradition both roots it in a personal space, and dissociates it from broader geo-political indicators of religious identity. Spontaneously evolving religious events such as these naturally express the actual (rather than only the imagined) constitution of the community.

Tradition, Authority and Dissent

The History of Hinduism is increasingly being seen as a product of competing Sanskritic and vernacular, Imperial and tribal, urban and village, Vedic and Tantric, Hindu and Buddhist, Muslim or European Colonial cultural forces, each backed by a concrete power-base, and accommodating or assimilating each other to create the complexity of modern Hinduism. Such study requires sensitivity to the way in which authority is transmitted. Michel Foucault's analysis of the way in which social ideologies of 'normal' practices and persons develop historically, is reflected in studies showing the cumulative progress of brahminical culture towards a self-legitimating orthodoxy that succeeds in establishing unity, but often through strategies of exclusion. Such study also requires attention to the ways in which the dominant ideologies and power-bases are resisted both by those whose specific local character is being assimilated into the broader culture, and by those who have been excluded. Both authority and dissent have indeed received considerable attention in Hindu

Studies, challenging simplistic univocal views to suggest a picture in which discourse, debate and dissent are all part of the natural life of Hinduism.

Tradition, Authority and Continuity

A 'tradition' can be defined as a culture that displays continuity over time, and to study something as a tradition is to examine the way in which it maintains coherence over time, connecting its past to its future. Heesterman defined it more widely as 'the way society formulates and deals with the basic problems of human existence' (Heesterman, 1985, p. 10). Yet there is inevitably a diachronic dimension of change in every tradition. 'Traditional Societies exploit flexibility while pretending permanence': even in the *Mīmāṃsā* tradition which devotes itself to bringing forth the literally 'timeless' message of the Vedas, grammatical rules can function as deep-seated mechanisms for allowing context-dependence and transformations in meaning (Kahrs, 1998, p. 1).

While the notion of Hinduism as a discrete religious institution – an 'ism' – is being deconstructed through historical genealogies of the idea, the binding structures of identity, authority and continuity that bind it as a tradition have come under the lens as a better way to understand what we mean by 'Hinduism'. Echoing the hermeneutic theories of Paul Ricoeur, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Pierre Bourdieu, scholars such as Jan Heesterman and Wilhelm Halbfass have explored the Vedic claims to have access to a transcendent realm, which have legitimated the continuity of Hindu cultures over the millennia (Heesterman, 1985; Halbfass, 1991). Others have shown the way in which Hinduism weaves the legitimacy of tradition into all of its practices, however anti-structure, or shockingly anti-nomian they may appear to be (Flood, 2006).

Frits Staal has suggested that, instead of the sort of religious designations that the Western academy has imposed on the diverse traditions of Asia, in Hindu structures of tradition 'what counts instead are ancestors and teachers – hence lineages, traditions, affiliations, cults, eligibility, and initiation – concepts with ritual rather than truth-functional overtones' (Staal, 1989, p. 393). It is through this variety of means that cultural elements are 'given over', literally 'trans-dare', from one temporal, geographical context to another (Squarcini, 2005, pp. 14–15). In particular traditions, particular tradition-defining factors dominate. Johannes Bronkhorst highlights the way in which many traditions legitimate themselves with regard to a continuity with revelatory events of the past (Bronkhorst in Squarcini, 2005, p. 62) – this is true of all *śruti*, or revelatory texts including both Vedic and Tantric revelations, and also to texts that draw on the inspired experience of Bhakti saints through recited poetry or hagiography. But some traditions refer to an eternal present (the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava tradition claims connections with the literally timeless eternal *līlā* or play of

Kṛṣṇa in his heaven), or to contemporary mediatory figures such as possessed persons or modern gurus (such as Osho who borrows notions of authority present in the Tantric traditions) and modern 'manifestations' of gods (such as Satya Sai Baba) for their authority. In each, however, it can be shown that the personal experience is dependent upon a foundational appeal to traditions that lend legitimacy to it. Hinduism then seems a culturally rooted phenomenon, rather than the contentless, contextless, universal experience imagined by perennialist scholars such as Rudolf Otto and Carl Jung.

Tradition can also gather and consolidate social power. Drawing on the Nietzschean, Marxist, Weberian and more recently Foucauldian traditions of cultural critique, recent work on Asian cultures has emphasized the way in which culture can establish and protect the authority of privileged groups of people – whether those with economic, social or political power, with a particular ethnicity or language, in a particular region or class, or simply those in culturally central positions. Emile Durkheim's conception of religious culture as a self-perpetuating expression of communal identities suggests that scholars explore the way in which Hindu ideas have elevated certain communities over against other contrasting ones (Durkheim, 1964). This notion of community has been elaborated by Clifford Geertz's understanding of religious culture as a system of symbols that describe the religious world with a supernatural authority that transforms that description into a *prescription* of how the religious world should be; this form of religious discourse automatically perpetuates the situations of the past into the future (Geertz, 1993). But Edward Said's 1979 book *Orientalism* pointed out that these cultural discourses are not simply neutral mechanisms of tradition-creation and perpetuation. Said alerted all disciplines in the Humanities to the mediation of power through cultural representations. It was in the wake of this work that scholars began to pay closer attention to the ways in Hindu religious culture martialled and deployed ideological power in society. Subsequent to this, the notion of 'tradition' as an idea constructed by particular groups for particular purposes, has become an important category in Indian critical studies. Many scholars have sought to unveil the various mechanisms of power and control that exist at the religious level.

One of the distinguishing features of the brahminical culture found in the Vedas and in the modern mediation of the Vedas, is the maintenance of ritual forms through strict disciplines of memorization and study. Such practices may have helped to sustain Hindu traditions in periods (such as Mauryan India) when other religions were dominant, and may have functioned as one of the most distinctive and appealing features of such traditions, offering a connection with past and present communal identities (see Timothy Lubin in Squarcini, 2005, pp. 77–103). It is possible that in the second century BCE as today, brahminical practice evoked a sense of continuous tradition and coherent identity. In *Rules without Meaning,* Frits Staal suggested that the meaning of

ritual actions in the Vedas did not refer to any particular ideas, as the elaborate hermeneutic explanations in the Brāhmaṇas might suggest. According to Staal, the precise enactment of rituals was really an affirmation of custom: the tradition was its primary meaning, adequate to sustain the continued practice of the same Vedic rituals for millennia.

However the study of Vedic ritual has become equalled, if not exceeded by that of Tantric ritual in which fresh and purposefully powerful formulations of tradition are expressed. Flood writes of the way in which the textual tradition on which Tantric practice, like Vedic ritual, is grounded, becomes literally inscribed on the body and mind of the practitioner. Far from liberating its members from tradition, according to Flood:

> . . . an entextualisation of the body occurs in Tantric practices that is specific yet allows a divergence of views and practices. The body is moulded within the constraints of historical tradition, even in its attempts to transcend those constraints. Second . . . the body is the vehicle for imaging and conceptualising tradition and cosmos such that the structure of the cosmos, forms of language, and text and tradition are themselves understood in terms of the body . . . Third, operating within these claims about the body and tradition is the idea of a tradition-dependent subjectivity; that the index of the first-person pronoun, the 'I', operates within realms of practice and discourse constrained by text and tradition. (Flood, 2006, pp. 4–5)

Flood's analysis suggests that tradition is not merely something that people refer to in thinking about their membership of communities. Rather, tradition is a way in which culture shapes the body and mind, largely through the mechanisms of ritual, and in this case with rigorous reference to foundational texts that are themselves grounded in Agamic (i.e. post-Vedic, direct-from-the-deity) revelations. In arguing in this way Flood is rejecting the notion of religion as drawing on immediate, transcendent experiences (as suggested by Schleiermacher, Rudolf Otto and Stephen Katz), asserting instead a Ricoeurian model in which all religious experience, of whatever kind, is shaped by and refers to the influence of cultural tradition (see Flood, 2006, pp. 24–7). Tradition, then, is not merely an idea, but something from which people, places and things take their meaning: as part of a tradition. Flood suggests that something as concrete as a physical body cannot exist as a simple object – it is already determined by the fluid matrix of cultural meanings. This suggests that the study of tradition is foundational for understanding every facet of religious culture.

In many cases the continuity of tradition happens unintentionally, through features such as language and communal identity, social values, ethical structures and cosmological theories that are so deeply rooted as implicit assumptions of everyday life, that the community remains unaware of them. These can,

in many cases be the most powerful and pervasive notions of tradition, hidden as they are from critical self-reflection. J. A. B. van Buitenen has noted the way in which Sanskrit has operated as cultural medium that elevated certain texts into a 'normative self-culture' with 'a sacral value' (van Buitenen, 1966, p. 34). The very fact that a text was in Sanskrit seems, in some cases, to have been adequate to demonstrate its authority. Contributing to the hermeneutics of suspicion that has become influential in Hindu Studies, Sheldon Pollock has gone on to point an accusatory finger at the language, highlighting its function as a purveyor of forms of authority that are culturally and ethnically exclusive, benefiting the few at the expense of the many. He notes its implicit affiliation with a particular community of origin envisioned as northern and non-Persian, non-Muslim, non-Dravidian, non-Tribal (see Pollock, 2006), and its association with an elite community of use, and an assumed aura of 'high' culture, the boundaries of which were policed by knowledge of the language. Indology departments are now beginning to teach other languages such as Hindi, Tamil, Malayalam and Bengali in recognition that the study of India needs to liberate itself from the very effective self-elevating propaganda of Sanskritic culture.

The political power of kings and chieftains, tied to specific religious groups through patronage, also helped to lend authority to certain traditions and to fund the spread of their ideologies through arts, architecture, epigraphy and texts. Jan Heesterman suggests that the economic connection of sacrificer and patron that tied together brahmins and kings or householders, established an alliance of tradition-preserving guardians of society (Heesterman, 1985). This has turned out to be only one of many such symbiotic relationships in which the religious prestige mediated even by religious specialists such as renouncers, mediums and ecstatic saints claiming to have access to realities beyond the social realm, helped to affirm courtly traditions by linking the human tradition to a higher order of ultimate authority. It was partly through the patronage of regional rulers that the Tantric temples and neo-Vedāntic *sampradāyas* of medieval and early modern Indian flourished, with the proviso that their own flourishing had to magnify a particular political group (Frykenberg in Llewellyn, 2005, pp. 127–31). The hermeneutics of tradition reminds scholars that a vast proportion of the arts, physical actions and theological ideas produced in each religious tradition formed for a purpose and under the influence of patronage. The concrete arts of temple and written text rarely rose out of private creativity in the secular, individualistic mode that is common in Western modernity.

Mythological narrative is one classic way in which communal history is formulated in Hindu culture, and such texts disseminate notions of continuity through their own pervasive binding presence as a source text. In contrast to the precise and systematically unalterable transmission of tradition through Vedic pedagogical disciplines, narrative provides a characteristically flexible form of transmission. On one hand it binds different developments of the

culture through a shared 'imaginaire' of recognizable ideas, themes, sequences and tropes that Bose likens to a phoneme (Bose, 2004, pp. 107–8). Scholars have debated the way in which *itihāsa* narratives actually relate to the Vedas (as elaboration of hymns and rituals such as that which is found in the brāhmaṇas) (e.g. Gonda, 1975, p. 125; Witzel, 1987; Minkowski, 1989), suggesting that ritual and narrative forms respectively, despite the difference between their formal and narrative connections to the past, are indeed integrated in a more complex, holistic mode of continuity by Hindu cultures. The increased study of epics and Purāṇas have played a particularly important rôle in discovering 'how inconspicuously popular customs were incorporated into brahmanical proceedings' (Kunal Chakrabarti in Chamapakalakshmi and Gopal, 2004, p. 76). The very structure of these oral narratives allowed for inclusion and contextual adaptation, while their 'revealed' status instantly legitimized whatever fell within their remit, or denigrated whatever was represented therein as being impure, demonic, *adharmic* or simply 'other'. Many Purāṇic myths have been able to attach themselves to the authority of the *Mahābhārata* (popularly regarded as the fifth Veda), by retelling stories or elaborating on them, and the *Mahābhārata* in turn retells innumerable stories from the Vedas that would otherwise be unknown to the majority of people in subsequent generations, mining the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* in order to retell the now popular stories of Urvaśī and Purūravas, and of Manu and the fish. Heesterman, echoing Clifford Geertz's view of religion as a model of the world, notes that the cosmological and philosophical features implicit in such narrative portrayals of the community imbue them with a fluid and flexible character since they must continually adapt to new ideas (Heesterman, 1985). The permeable boundaries of humanity and divinity characteristic of Hindu cultures can also allow leaders and clans to claim a direct divine heritage, as do the epic protagonists Rāma and the Pāṇḍavas. Histories of people then become stories of a human connection to a transcendent and unchanging, ever-legitimate world.

If Vedic tradition was largely handed down in a father-to-son transmission that strengthened and was strengthened by the brahminical social unit of the clan, many of those who stepped beyond the world of Vedic ritual into the more esoteric soteriologies of yogic, Bhakti and Tantric traditions received the tradition through ritual initiation by the guru. Here the *paramparā,* literally, the succession of teachers and disciples that extended 'one after another' was an important vehicle for legitimation of the individual. This had particular significance in the philosophical schools, where reasoning threatened to take individuals in directions that might stray from the tradition, and also in Tantric circles where the experiences that resulted from yogic disciplines could also lead in unexpected directions if left without a guide. The moment of dīkṣā, or initiation, was essential as the mechanism through which one became part of a tradition – not merely by ideological assent or socially proclaimed affiliation,

but *ontologically*, as a transformed being remade in a new nature. The Tantric process often involved ritually dissolving and 'recreating' oneself through mantras and other magical means. The new nature achieved in this way was usually divine. Gavin Flood points out that this notion of tradition offers an axiomatically different model of personal change from that with which the monadic rationality and materialist physics of the West is familiar. In the view characteristic of post-Enlightenment Western modernity, it is individual rationality, freed from social tradition that facilitates change. In many Hindu traditions of guru-initiated discipline, 'subjective transformations occur not through the assertion of individuality but through subjecting self and body to a master and to tradition' (Flood, 2005, p. 187).

In the charismatic bhakti *sampradāyas*, the source of authority shifted towards individuals whose claim to engagement with the divine was asserted through either hagiographical narratives or ecstatic poetry personally authored by the founding saints. The more direct claim was made by those who left devotional literature of their own attesting their 'visions' and sense of divine presence in poetry 'signed' with signatory verses and autobiographical references (see Hawley, 2005, pp. 40–7). But equally if not more influential on the imagination of the members of the tradition are the hagiographic stories which have so frustrated historians seeking to divide popular imagination from historical record. While hagiographies cannot be taken as an objective, independently verified source of 'factual' knowledge, they nevertheless provide an excellent guide to the ways in which authority becomes established in the *sampradāyas* that are such an important structure in contemporary popular Hinduism. Tony Stewart has recently sought to trace the precise processes by which an official hagiographic biography was formed in the early modern period, noting the way in which the story of the tradition being established through the processes of hagiographic record, textual collection and temple practice, is itself a source of the pedigree of authenticity (Stewart, 2010). Such accounts suggest that explicit mechanisms for retaining the tradition had become important to the religious community in periods of religious plurality and competition.

Beyond the religious sphere of points of access to supernatural sources, the ways in which the intellectual culture asserted knowledge and exclusion are also important. Scholars are learning a great deal from the way in which disagreement or disapproval are expressed. Those who were declared unorthodox or *nāstika*, without caste, impure, barbaric, slaves or demons, were often the other inhabitants of the same region or society, in contrast to whom the authors defined their own tradition. Bronkhorst's study of Greater Magadha pays close attention to those whom early Vedic authors felt to be unorthodox, and thereby reaches a much clearer understanding of the criteria that defined the 'orthodox' community's self-identity. *Dīkṣā* initiations and the long courses of rigorous guru-led disciplines that earned them, helped to limit esoteric knowledge and maintain

the coherence of those traditions, while the cryptically allusive character of the *Sūtra* texts also helped to guard traditional knowledge from outsiders.

Perhaps the most obvious structures of Hindu religious tradition are the *sampradāyas*, literally the movements that were 'given' by important founders, the *mathas*, or monastic residential communities, and the *darśanas*, or philosophical schools. These were not usually initiatory ritual trainings in the same mode as the *guru-paramparā* lineages, but rather teachings conveyed by the *ācārya* or teacher to his pupils. Today the texts of these teachings are generally available to all through Sūtras, treatises and commentarial writings, but at one time they were hidden from the public majority. In the philosophical schools of both the earlier Nyāya and later Neo-Nyāya periods, debates functioned as natural filters for competing traditions. The internal principles of logic did not always determine the course of tradition: formal sophistic strategies were listed in the manuals for debating, through which a skilful debater could trick or bully his way to a victory for his tradition and a refutation of the perspective of opponent. Knowledge was part of the body of tradition, and in these and many ways had to be carefully controlled by the tradition's guardians.

In the modern period, voices in the political sphere of Hindu cultures in India and abroad have defined Hindu tradition as a coherent cultural entity possessing a history that confers depth and legitimacy on the cultural product of its members. V. D. Savarkar helped to establish this idea, mirroring past centuries in which traditions appealed to connection with a transcendent and timeless reality, by describing Hinduism as an eternal order (*sanātana dharma*) rather than a historical culture. Paul Hacker has suggested that this 'neo-Hindu' movement is precisely defined by its appeal to Hinduism as a Western-type of tradition – that is historically coherent and homogenous and centred on a touchstone of revelatory texts and transmission (Hacker, 1978, p. 582). Some have suggested that the idea of Hindu tradition as a continuous, pure, Vedic culture mirroring an eternal *sanātana dharma* is a classic example of what Eric Hobsbaum has termed an 'invented tradition' – a way of understanding the tradition that has been formed by its members at a particular point in history, rather than growing organically out of original sources. The study of distinctively Hindu structures of tradition complement such 'invented' models with a recognition of the way in which Hinduism has also evolved organically in a 'noncentralised evolving composite of variegated ways of worship' (Fisher, 2002, p. 124).

Dissent in Hindu Culture

Other dissenting material is encouraging scholars to examine the ways in which the questioning or subversion of authority has also been an integral practice in Hindu culture from an early period. Where the continuity of tradition can be

discerned, there are also the necessary shifts and evolution that are implied in the adaptation of culture from one generation to the next (see Thapar, 1994, p. 84). Dissent and desire for change inspired the foundation of some of the most prominent traditions within Hindu culture, from the renouncer lifestyle, to Tantric ideologies of power rather than purity, and Bhakti thinkers' prioritization of internal inspiration over social elevation. Further, scholars themselves now realize ways in which they contribute to the powerplay of discourses in the culture they study, with the result that for scholars of religious traditions, the practice of questioning authority has become a '*sine qua non* of the discipline' (Smith in Llewelyn, 2005, p. 102).

The orthodoxy of Vedic, brahminical culture has, in its relative success, continued to face dissent from major groups who were eventually assimilated into the Vedic self-representation to greater and lesser degrees. In a volume dedicated to the social historian Romila Thapar and to revealing 'the dialectic between heterodoxy and orthodoxy as also between dissent and conformism' (Champakalakshmi and Gopal, 1996, p. 1), K. Meenakshi notes that the Tamil Siddhas were only one instance of a broader spectrum of groups including the Buddhists, Cārvāka materialists, Jains, Saivite yogic schools, many of the Bhakti traditions, and Sants of both Maharashtra and north-western India, which rejected Vedic textual and ritual authority, showed 'hostility to caste consciousness' and ritual purity, and affirmed other means of access to liberation, blessing or insight (Meenakshi in Champakalakshmi and Gopal, 1996, pp. 111–29). Meenakshi translates a selection of ninth-century Siddha poetry to emphasize the point:

> Adorning a planted stone with a few flowers as if it were a god,
> What is that mantra which you
> mutter going round [it]?
> When the God is within you, does the
> stone ever speak . . .
> Even if the four Vedas you recite till you get tired, Even if you smear
> the sacred
> ash all over the body and babble
> foolishly, The Supreme Being will not be there. (Meenakshi in
> Champakalakshmi and Gopal, 1996, pp. 130–1)

Critical approaches to received religious belief and practice such as these are widely found in vernacular writings, suggesting that the Hindu tradition is as much a product of dissenting movements and literatures that rebel against the Vedic heritage, as of the Vedas and their authors.

Many of the genres of Hindu cultural expression implicitly allow for internal dissent. Conceptions such as the *āśrama* system unite opposed contemporaneous

religious paths in a single inclusive structure that minimized the opposition between two different lifestyles and value systems. The Vedas, Upaniṣads and Purāṇas act as compendia that incorporate diverse texts, with little sectarian redaction of the kind that shaped the Christian Bible, thereby expressing divergent views under the auspices of revelation. Even the Sūtras, through which philosophical schools aimed to capture their doctrines in a more permanent form, are sufficiently cryptic as to allow for very different interpretations, which are made explicit in the commentarial method that allows Śaṅkara and Mādhva to derive diametrically opposed metaphysics from the same source texts of the Upaniṣads, *Bhagavad Gītā* and *Brāhma Sūtras*. The high proportion of first-person speech in the literary style of the epics also allows their vast panoply of characters to express conflicting views. This literary style is developed further in devotional poetry based on epic narratives, such as the *Gītagovinda* which explores the psychology of inner conflict, as when Rādhā laments the paradox of being both righteously angry at Kṛṣṇa, and passionately in love with him (Gītagovinda 7. 1–12 and 39). Folk literature has been particularly effective in expressing dissenting perspectives: writing of the Bengali 'Satya Pir' tales in which male figures of authority fail and are often replaced by heroic women, Tony Stewart suggests that:

> Narrative allows for exploration with a kind of protection and impunity not granted to the impetuous real-life actor. . . . They say what cannot be said, poke fun at those in authority, play off of sexual tensions, and in many small ways challenge what passes as standard. These types of narrative are vitally important to any culture . . . These crystallised moments are not an index to what was – or even to what was considered – ideal . . . Rather I would argue that these literatures reveal the range of the imagination of earlier times, mapping constraints on what could be thought, what might be contemplated, and testing the limits of the work's discursive space. (Stewart, 2004, p. 4)

Such genres facilitate an integrative response to the inevitable conflicts which have necessarily existed in a society as complex as that of the Indian subcontinent. In many cases they have helped to transform rivalries with the potential for conflict, into collaborative arts and sciences which furnish a wealth of cultural resources. Heinrich von Steitencron has argued that the recognition of this sort of diversity within Hindu religious culture can serve to reduce existing tensions within and between different religious groups (Von Steitencron, 1995, p. 79).

'Sanskritization', the process by which smaller cultures were assimilated into the Sanskrit-speaking self-proclaimed 'high-culture' of Hinduism, also acted as a medium in which minority perspectives could become expressed as part of a larger-scale conversation that is reflected in the Vedic tradition,

providing a means of social mobility; for instance, the South Indian Coorg community which had little connection with the neighbouring Tamil, Malayalam or Marathi cultures was able to interact and achieve a higher social and economic status in this way (Srinivas, 1952). As a result, elements of non-Vedic, tribal and small-scale local culture were integrated into the Sanskritic umbrella-discourse. Texts that are now considered canonical for Vedic tradition such as the Brāhmaṇas, Upaniṣads, epics and Purāṇas, acquired a multivocal, open texture in which both unity and plurality could be expressed, and even in some cases disagreement.

However, Sanskritic culture has also operated as a mainstream discourse imposed by brahmins and ruling classes in a 'top-down' dissemination to the traders, rural workers, women, children and regional chiefs, local religious specialists and rulers who formed the majority of the population. In response to this, the promotion of vernacular languages allied with a localization of rule, acted as a successful disruption of the power systems allied with Sanskritic culture. This flourishing of regional cultures brought 'a new vernacular game of polity and poetry' which is only just coming to an end, and which is starting to attract its own rebels (Pollock, 2006, p. 30). Pollock's analysis echoes current debates over whether the rise of devotional bhakti traditions such as the Āḻvārs and Nāyaṉārs, Vīraśaivas, Śrīvaiṣṇavas, Gauḍiyas, Puṣṭimārg and other groups, constitutes a coherent movement focused on supplanting the old order with a more egalitarian, localized (through saints, temples, pilgrimages and vernaculars) form of 'protest' religion, not unlike the Lutheran insistence on vernacular texts for the masses and a soteriology premised on one's personal relationship with god. What is certain is that forms of religious engagement for women, lower castes and local nature, spirit or possession cults which had been marginalized by the spread of Vedic culture, were brought within the remit of the Vedic transmission of ideas through the new dispensation made by texts such as the *Bhagavad Gītā* and figures such as the Vīraśaiva saint Basava, who asserted that salvation was open to everyone, rather than only to the few. The multifaceted Hindu temple also became a space in which those communities could, in theory, be united as a religious culture with new, more expansive boundaries.

At the level of private dissent, we see individuals both using and rejecting traditional religious roles in order to escape from their restrictions. Frequently dissent is voiced through appropriated channels of orthodox culture, as demonstrated by the transformation of acts of ritual suicide from an accepted rejection of social structures in pursuit of liberation, to a rejection of social and liberatory goals as a whole, made concrete in political situations (Baldissera in Squarcini, 2005). The many-pathed structure of certain *sampradāyas* and schools also allows for internal disagreement under an overarching ideology and sectarian affiliation. The Śrīvaiṣṇava and Śaiva division into parallel religious paths

of *grace* (the Śrīvaiṣṇava 'cats' and Śaiva Siddhānta sects), and paths of *spiritual effort* (the Śrīvaiṣṇava 'monkeys' and the non-Saiddhantika sects), demonstrates a willingness to preserve bonds of unity by subdividing belief and practice under a single tradition. The *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* are full of dissenting voices whose concerns and complaints resonate without being either silenced or answered.

Such orthodox texts are full of unorthodox figures who transcend the usual roles ascribed to them. The female renouncer and yoga-practitioner Sulabha who appears in the *Mahābhārata* (XII. 308) is a character who excels in her discipline, decides to test the renowned King Janaka, possesses his body (he complains that they are of different *varṇas* and should not mix, but she ignores this), and proceeds to interrogate him with questions driving home the point that there cannot be any difference or boundary between them according to the Advaitic outlook: 'why is it that you do not see your own body and your own soul in the bodies and souls of others?' (trans. from Dhand, 2008). This is a text that affirms the outsider on many counts (as female over male, as renouncer over king) using a discursive style that facilitates dissent, and drawing on an Advaitic philosophy in a way that systematically denies boundaries. A similar argument is used by Mirabai when she is questioned about gender divides: she famously replies that all souls are the same gender in the face of Kṛṣṇa as the (male) beloved.

The disruption of social and cosmic structures is an important form of dissent in most religious traditions, but Hinduism is exceptional in its accommodation of just these factors as fruitful themes within the religious culture. Thus, for instance, antinomian behaviour and the express rejection of social and religious norms are integrated into Hindu soteriologies within the renouncer, Tantric and some Bhakti traditions, while the 'anti-structure', uncontrollable and destructive ethos of Kālī has an important place as a necessary counterbalance to the gods who protect order. Doniger suggests that iconography, which features as the main form of 'text' in most quotidien worship, is a way of integrating unresolved tensions and contradictions into the tradition, citing the erotic yet ascetic figure of Śiva as an 'iconic resolution of the paradox' (Doniger, 1973, pp. 8–11).

By contrast, scepticism is a more challenging trend, found relatively rarely as a formal perspective in the Hindu tradition, but pervasively present in the culture through the influence of Buddhist Mādhyamaka thinkers such as Dignāga and Candrakirti, and those who followed the Cārvāka materialists. Perhaps influenced by the desire-renouncing ideology of the Theravāda Buddhists, Hindu apologists for renunciatory lifestyles sometimes expressed a sceptical assessment of the pleasure and justice of life that was only barely balanced by an affirmation of liberation, heaven or an ultimate reality or deity. Scepticism runs strong in the psychology of the *Mahābhārata*'s conflicted hero Yudhiṣṭhira,

and in other characters such as Eklavya, whose low-caste status prevents him from attaining recognition of his hard-won skills, and the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s Sītā who abandons society completely, disillusioned by her experiences of profound injustice. Through such characters the texts highlight the 'problem of pointless suffering', and such situations subsequently provided crucial dramatic material for Sanskrit literature, in which tragedy forms an important genre. Tragic tropes became prominent in the Bhakti literature which sought to evoke *bhava*, an intense emotional response from the audiences. Abhinavagupta wrote that literature should display suffering in order to cause disillusionment with the human world, and a subsequent disinterested refuge in the search for *mokṣa*. However in the Purāṇic, poetic and dramatic versions of the story of Kṛṣṇa, the pain experienced by Kṛṣṇa and his family, friends and lovers in the Vraja region which he would one day have to leave, provided an endless resource for intensely tragic feelings that became incorporated into the characteristic devotional mood. Suffering itself becomes a way of 'enjoying' the world.

These and other media allowed internal disagreement to exist within the many strands of the culture, and provided a voice for dissent towards those who portrayed themselves as representing the mainstream of Hinduism. Such plurality furnished a diverse resource for cultural creativity, and the ethos of dissent was transformed into a powerful theme *within* the Hindu arts, encouraging change or expansion of existing traditions, rather than rebellion and destruction. Thus such dissent became part of the process by which Hinduism has developed its strikingly complex yet generally tolerant forms of religious tradition.

Brian Smith offers a cautionary note to scholars questioning the assumed authorities of Hindu culture. He argues that while it is important to:

> decenter traditional sources of authority, to represent the interests of competing voices with the tradition that have been disregarded or silenced (discontents or 'heretics') . . . [nevertheless] there is certainly no reason to single out the theologians of Hinduism. Such an enterprise, if set into motion, should be directed at *all* of the 'religions.' . . . if we as students of religion decide it is incumbent upon us to decentre the theological authorities of the religions we study, we should be mindful of the ethical and intellectual consequences of such interventions. (Smith in Llewellyn, 2005, pp. 112–13)

Hinduism and Other Religions

From an early stage, the cultures that we count as 'Hindu' have co-existed with other religious traditions. This is reflected in the tendency of Hindu cultures not

to require agreement in belief or worship; It may be that the assumption of plural deities in multiple forms and locations has provided a framework of tolerance for multiple co-existing religious traditions in the subcontinent, as indeed, through much of South-East Asia, and in Japanese and Korean Shinto. However the relation with other religions has become a point of political tension, with some feeling that a culturally or religiously 'Hindu India' has suffered as a result of its tolerance, or of the incursions made by other traditions that have not, in such views, extended the 'courtesy' of a reciprocal non-proselytizing tolerance. However with the rise of neo-Vedic notions of Hindu origin and identity such as those promoted by groups such as Dayananda Sarasvatī's Ārya Samāj, and more recently by the Shiv Sena of Maharashtra, and some factions within the BJP, scholars have begun to interrogate these self-representations. Scholars are highlighting both ways in which Hinduism has benefited from the interaction with (and frequently the assimilation of) other religious cultures, and also ways in which conflict at the boundaries between Indian religious traditions has been influential and sometimes distinctly damaging.

From an early period Hindu traditions drew upon different religious cultures. Debates over the origin of the 'Aryan' authors of the Vedas have begun to steer towards a model of cultural synthesis which sees elements both of Indo-European culture and also of Dravidian gods and ideas in the combined culture of the texts. This is supported by Renfrew's idea of the existence of Indo-Aryan peoples in the Indus Valley early enough to constitute an authentically indigenous culture (Renfrew, 1987), and Parpola's idea that the Aryan invasion was actually a gradual early migration which synthesized with indigenous elements as it formed a place in the new society (Parpola, 1994).

A synthetic model of Hinduism is supported by Bronkhorst's thesis that the 'Vedāntic' culture described in late Vedic texts was formed through a relation of appropriation and reaction to distinctly different cultures such as that of the kingdom of 'Greater Magadha' (Bronkhorst, 2007). Tantric Studies is also revealing ways in which tribal or clan-based religious traditions, of shamanic, animistic and magical types, were combined with the Vedic religion that had been formalized in ritual and text, to form the distinctive types of popular Hindu worship that remain the norm today. The study of Vedānta shows traces of borrowing from Buddhist philosophy, while scholars of Bhakti have also come to acknowledge the ways in which it blended with Islamic Sufi ideas and Persian poetic forms, while articulating a distinctive 'Hindu' religious practice in reaction against Muslim rule. Most lately, nineteenth- and twentieth-century reformers such as Vivekananda, Debendranath Tagore, Aurobindo Ghose and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, who were influential in shaping contemporary ideas about the nature of Hinduism, have been seen as synthesizers, recasting Hindu sources in European and sometimes explicitly Christian styles of expression.

In contrast to the edited, integrated portrayals of the gods in Purāṇic and Epic texts, local depictions of religious figures tend to retain signs of synthesis. The southern goddess of disease and rain, Maariyamman, is generally shown as an energetic and regal goddess like Durgā, but she also carries the trident of the Purāṇic Śiva on one hand, and the *kapāla* begging-bowl of the Tantric Śaiva or renouncer on the other, and makes the *abhaya* mudrā, meaning 'do not fear', thus highlighting her role as essentially a typical goddess of disease who must be both propitiated and averted. Saints can also provide a window onto local cultural synthesis: for instance the popular Andhra Pradesh saint Shirdi Sai Baba is portrayed in stories and images as a culturally ambivalent figure who appears as much like a Muslim fakir as a Hindu devotee, guru or yogi. He is a mirror of the culture of Maharashtra in which the Muslim cultures that crossed the Thar desert and Arabian sea combined with the Śaivism and Jain renunciatory traditions of the west of India.

The results of synthesis are seen in contemporary Hinduism today: At the beginning of his 'Hindu History in Historical Perspective', Ariel Glucklich invokes the town of Gaya, near the famed Bodhgaya of Buddhist pilgrimage, as a deeply multi-faceted religious culture. Describing '*pūjā* offerings of water, flowers, leaves, fruits, along with the burning of camphor flames, verbal offerings of mantras (*japa*), storytellings, group recitations, (*sankīrtana*), music performances, gift giving', surrounding 'the rituals for the ancestors, the priestly chants, obsequies under a large tree' (Glucklich, 2008, p. 4), he argues that:

> What we see in Gaya is a highly textured interlocking of multiple traditions comfortably co-existing in a single location. Other places throughout India function in the same way, often adding elements from Jainism, classical Greek cultures, Islam, tribal customs or other sources. The full collage of India's cultural map includes them all. (Glucklich, 2008, p. 5)

A formative interaction with other religious cultures can be seen clearly in many regions influenced by migration, trade, colonialism and mission. However Hinduism's relation to other religions has been a sore point for many; in a religion that has been too often denied its own history, roots and identity, the suggestion that it is also tied up with the histories of other religious traditions in India can seem like a further attack.

Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism

The standard model of **Buddhism** was that it was a 'protestant' reaction to Hinduism, developing novel interpretations of characteristic Hindu ideas and practices. This model resonated well with European experience of Protestant

churches arising as a vernacular resistance to ritual and financial elitism in Early Modern Catholicism, and thinkers such as Max Weber, who was known for his own analysis of the rise of protestantism in the West, contributed to this reading (see Weber, 1996). Many aspects of early Buddhist discourse support this picture of Buddhism as a 'conscious development from but also a reaction against brahminical teachings' (Gombrich, 2006, p. 12): the caste and gender specificity of Hindu *dharma* was reinterpreted as the universal ethics of Buddhist *dhamma*, the ritual fires of the Vedic ritual were cynically recast as the tempting fires of desire, and the ātman or essential self, which was the goal of much yogic and vedāntic practice, was replaced by the goal of realizing *anātman*, the lack of an enduring self. This model highlights the dialectical connections between the two religions, and the explicit critique which Buddhist thinkers levelled at brahminical culture.

Recently, however, a new model has been increasing in popularity among historians of religion who suggest that the ideological roots of Buddhism were well established at an earlier period as part of a religious culture focused on renunciation, inner discipline and liberation (*mokṣa)* that existed parallel to the householder lifestyle, focused on external ritual and heaven (*svarga*) promoted in the *Ṛg Veda.* Johannes Bronkhorst locates this alternative culture in the region of Greater Magadha, to which early Hindu texts warily allude (Bronkhorst, 2007). On this model the later texts of the Vedas and those works which took their direct cue from them such as the *Brāhma Sūtras* and *Bhagavad Gītā* reflected a period in which the two traditions were being synthesized into a single multi-faceted culture that could accommodate both approaches. Ninian Smart and Knut Axel Jacobsen have suggested that Hinduism as we currently know it can be seen as an offshoot of Buddhism (Smart and Jacobsen in King, 2007).

Whatever may be the correct balance between these two theories, it is clear that many important Hindu ideas developed as a formative process of assimilation and polemical reaction to Buddhist culture, and vice-versa. The culture of many courts and governing classes in North India was effectively Buddhist for the period of Maurya rule, and distinctive characteristics of Buddhism were incorporated into Hindu culture, possibly influencing the integration of the renouncer traditions into mainstream Hinduism, the widespread adoption of belief in rebirth and karma and the adoption of stone temples as a place for communal practice. Buddhism's links with South-East Asia and China also provided an important conduit for the Tantric traditions of Tibet and Chinese intellectual culture, and it further influenced Hindu tradition through relations of contrast. The revival of Hindu trends under northern Indian empires after the Mauryas involved the reassertion or invention of features that were lacking in the Buddhist culture, such as a vigorous tradition of deity narratives, communal and charismatic worship practices and festivals focused on the pantheon of deities. The arguments of Buddhist philosophers such as Dignāga and

Candrakirti in the fifth to seventh centuries were enormously influential on the Nyāya school of logic and the culture of debate and dialectic, while in the ninth and tenth centuries Buddhists developed a philosophical sophistication that provoked particularly subtle refutations from Vedāntic theologians such as Śaṅkara (Arnold, 2005; Taber, 2005). In the North-East of the subcontinent, at the nexus of the Himalayan and South-East Asian transmissions of the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition, the development of Tantric elements in Bengali Vaiṣṇava worship owed much to Buddhist trends. In the twentieth century the promotion of Buddhism by Ambedkar revived the place of Buddhism as a form of check on Hindu cultural values, yet throughout Indian history, Indian Buddhism and Hinduism have continued to share the same fundamental religious vocabulary of concepts such as *karma*, ritual forms such as *mantras* and initiatory techniques, disciplines such as *yoga*, and even deities.

In later centuries **Jain** communities became more influential than those of the Buddhists, who by the medieval period had largely moved beyond India into North, East and South-East Asia. Tending towards pluralistic conceptions of truth as *anekāntavāda*, or 'many-pointed', and of souls as innumerable individual units of consciousness, Jainism arguably had more in common with the Sāṃkhya strand of Indian philosophy, than with the relativization of truth and the negation of the permanent existence of the soul by many Indian Buddhist schools. Jainism did not gain the patronage of any ruler as enthusiastic and powerful as the Buddhist emperor Aśoka Maurya (his father Candragupta Maurya was probably a Jain, but less eager than his son to promote it as a 'religion of empire'). Nevertheless Jain communities have continued to live alongside Hindus, claiming an important place in the society. In Gujarat, Rajasthan and other regions, Jainism became an important influence on society by virtue of the community's conspicuous wealth, acquired through trade and expressed in elaborate temple complexes, and their prominent exemplification of the ascetic ideal through a monastic tradition of wandering monks and nuns. It is possible that their example was influential on the monastic purity and celibacy espoused by reform groups such as the Swaminarayan movement. Gandhi claimed that the Gujarati Jain emphasis on the notion of *ahiṃsā* or 'non-harm', formed an important part of his own religious background, and Gujarat has more recently seen the development of the 'Akram Vijnan Marg', a modern sect which combines elements of Sāṃkhya-Yoga, Advaita and Jain metaphysics into a new 'Hindu-Jain' model of reality that has attracted supporters (Flugel, 2005).

Hinduism, Zoroastrianism and Islam

As India's immediate westerly neighbour, the **Ancient Near East** seems at one point to have shared some degree of cultural continuity with Vedic India,

attested by the presence of languages with shared roots, gods with similar characteristics and a similarly stratified vision of society (Allen, 1987). This cultural gateway, via Pakistan, Afghanistan and the western Indian states of Gujarat, Rajasthan, the Punjab and Kashmir, admitted Greek forces in the fourth and third centuries BCE under Alexander the Great and his general Seleuceus, and in the second and third centuries BCE under the Bactrian Greek kings. From the second century BCE to the fourth CE these gateway territories became home to Siberian groups arriving from the north, and from the third to the seventh centuries CE the area of Sindh was part of the Sassanid empire and thus effectively Persian. Throughout this period cultural exchange took place through trade along the silk and spice routes that linked Western Europe, Greece, Iran, North India and East Asia. Royal courts also functioned as a site of cultural influence with emissaries exchanged between Persian, Greek and Indian courts. Thus by the time Islam had begun to cross the Arabian Peninsula towards India, the Greeks, Central Asians and Persians had already participated considerably in the culture of North India for some time, while Indian emissaries and soldiers had made their way into the courts of Persian leaders such as Cyrus the Great and Darius I. It is also possible that early Jewish and Christian traders or travellers made their way into Indian territories through this channel between Greece, Persia, Central Asia and western India, although little record is left and such meetings seem to have made relatively little mark on the culture.

It is likely that the growing dominance of Islam in Iranian territories from the seventh century onwards pushed Persian communities who could not adapt to the new culture eastward into the western reaches of the Indian subcontinent. In the tenth century there seems to have been an influx of **Zoroastrians** settling largely in Gujarat, the trade centre of Mumbai, and the region of Sindh (in modern Pakistan), who proceeded to establish local structures of priesthood while adopting local dress. Middle Persian was maintained for some time, but as the immigrants engaged with the indigenous population, the community found it necessary to send requests for guidance to Zoroastrians closer to the homeland. The Indian Zoroastrians, who became known as the Parsis, had endogamous caste-rules and purity restrictions that were almost as strong as those of the Hindu communities around them, and thus they maintained a relatively high degree of independence. With Muslim rule, Persian language and literature came to be appreciated in Indian kingdoms, and when power shifted from the Muslims to the British, the Parsis remained a privileged group less on account of their contribution to the arts, but rather through their contribution to the administrative workforce of the empire in India. Many colonial overseers saw a western mercantile group, and thus a natural ally in the Parsi communities.

Persian acted as a link language between Indian languages on one hand, and Muslim and European languages on the other; it was through a Persian

translation that the *Upaniṣads* first became a popular text in Europe. While in many ways, Zoroastrian religious forms of deity, ritual and society had much more in common with Vedic Hinduism than did Buddhist and Jain and Tantric traditions, it was less the religious traditions and beliefs of the Persians that were influential on Hinduism, than their literary arts, and these largely through the mediation of Islamic culture.

The relationship between **Islam** and Hinduism in India worked in different ways at different levels of society, often following a pattern of imposition and denigration at the level of rule and in the earlier stages of Islamic arrival, whereas a pattern of integration through communal administration, creativity, business and even family, often prevailed at the popular social level of merchants, soldiers, clerics, religious figures and residential members of more settled Indian communities (see Ahmad, 1964, for an account of both phases). The Hindu-Muslim relationship has been popularly portrayed as a highly agonistic relationship characterized by oppressive colonial rule and polar theological opposition. While there were indeed military struggles throughout the subcontinent between indigenous Hindu and invading Muslim groups, and some Muslim governments did explicitly seek to repress Hindu religious culture, this view needs to be balanced by a recognition of the highly integrated communities that thrived in the past and which still exist throughout the majority of modern India.

The picture of Islamic rule stands against a background of long-standing migration and influence from Zoroastrian Persia and the Arabian peninsula. In many cases simple antagonism and syncretism were not the only options; scholars have highlighted the way in which a more realistic, non-ideological pragmatism determined the shared life of Muslims and Hindus in many contexts. In Assam and Bengal, Muslim pirs who were indistinguishable from Hindu holymen were worshiped by both communities. Far from a 'syncretic' ideology, this practice can be seen as the result of a community turning to any available centres of power, regardless of their label as 'Hindu' or 'Muslim' (Stewart, 2004). In Ayodhya, 'Muslim rulers lavishly favoured one section of Rajput Hindus in the midst of their fierce fights against others [while] Rajputs too saw as their own enemies only those of the Muslim gentry whom they believed to be the Muslim ruler's agents' (Alam in Champakalakshmi and Gopal, 1996, pp. 190–1). In cases such as these, one sees less a conflict of cultures, than a pragmatic, case-by-case approach to identity and interaction, in which political or personal well-being is revealed as a greater priority than any grand-narrative of affiliation.

Muslim rule took a range of different forms. The eleventh-century Afghan emperor Mahmud of Ghazni, for instance, was largely a non-resident ruler of areas of north-eastern India, allowing Hindu governments to continue in their rule as vassal states. In such cases, the state lost funds, temples were pillaged

and communities could become vulnerable and unstable under the threat of Muslim military forces. But there was relatively little change to laws or customs. However Ghurid, Timurid and Mughal governments succeeded the Ghaznavids, moving more firmly into the Indian subcontinent and into Hindu societies. Many of these Muslim rulers saw Hindus as part of the same sort of animistic, polytheistic, image-worshiping society as those Arabian tribes from which Islam had distanced itself through the monotheism of the Qur'anic revelation. On the same model of behaviour that they had used in similar situations elsewhere, Muslim rulers destroyed religious images, and forced many indigenous populations to either pay a tax levied on non-Muslims, or to convert. Even conversion brought limited advantage as, with the growth of indigenous Muslim communities born on the land and in the culture of the subcontinent, a Muslim-Indian caste system developed that put converts below the level of 'elite' Muslims who had family roots in classically Muslim territories further west and north. For some Hindus, the presence of these outsiders would have been considered a pollution of their ritual purity, and an attack on the ideal of the 'dharmic' Hindu state that had been developing in Indian kingdoms for centuries (Laine, 2003).

Yet the imported infrastructure of clerics, soldiers and tradesmen for the new governments began to assimilate into the local communities, introducing a very different interaction at the level of everyday life rather than of imposed 'top-down' administration. While governments battled, their subjects often traded and even inter-married. Muslim communities growing in areas such as the Deccan formed the basis for worship of indigenous Muslim saints (Green, 2006). Wandering Sufis of the Chishti, Naqshbandi, Qadiri, Suhrawardi and other orders began to circulate in the society, and Persian became the language of northern India's ruling elites in which administration and courtly culture took place. The Persian language of the devotional love poetry of Rumi, Hafiz and others, also travelled with Sufis who sought to disseminate their ideas and practices among medieval and early-modern Hindus. Even today both Hindi and Urdu languages blend Persian and Sanskrit words together, often retaining important conceptual nuances that reflect the two respective cultures in their use. The sixteenth-century Mughal emperor Akbar, famed for his syncretic interest in a range of religions and his support for Hindu customs of ritual and pilgrimage, helped to create a courtly culture and legal framework that reflected the make-up of the mixed society into which he had himself been born.

Thus at the level of the majority of the population in rural and urban settings, within the lived context of work, trade and even worship, Muslims and Hindus came to form shared communities. In some cases, Muslims retained different dress, lifestyle, worship practices and often separate sectors of the city. Identities remained important, as did the social markers of identity (Laine, 2003, pp. 102–4). With so many differences between 'Hindu' groups also publicly

evident in dress, practice, purity rules and language, communities as a whole were able to make room for Muslims as they had done for other Indian groups; each culture, and society as a whole, altered accordingly.

Over the centuries specifically religious forms of integration also occurred. In some cases these were explicitly engineered by figures like the thirteenth-century Sufi saint Muinuddin Chishti, who arrived with the Ghorid empire equipped for life at the forefront of military invasion, with a philosophy of 'peace to all'. Tradition holds that Chishti, whose tomb at Ajmer is the centre of a shrine that was an inspiration for Akbar's relative tolerance and is still visited today, sought to disassociate himself from the Muslim government by rejecting any advantageous associations. He instead focused on forms of charity that would link him directly to the Hindu populace. In other cases religious bridges arose through unconscious, implicit developments by the community as a whole. Hindu and Muslim villagers in various states collaborate in festivals where mixed styles of worship are accorded to Muslim or Hindu 'saints' by a combined community of worshippers (see Mohammad, 2010; Gotschalk, 2000; Burman, 2002).

Other indigenous figures naturally assimilated and projected the combined culture and values of both religions. The poet Kabīr is one such figure, deploying colloquial devotional terminology from both traditions in a shared poetic vocabulary, expressing commonalities and asserting culture-transcendent truths about the divine in a ' "grassroots" vernacular . . . spontaneous rhetoric' calculated to appeal to all (Hess in Schomer, 1987, pp. 143–4; Vaudevīlle, 1998). Indeed, the northern Sants, a group of saints in which Kabīr is included, were distinguished by their syncretic ability to 'link' cultures, using bold colloquial language to create a cultural space that reflected 'images of daily life and work' (Zelliot in Schomer, 1987, p. 92). The popularity of the sixteenth-century Muslim poet Latif Shah and the seventeenth-century Hindu Sufi Chanda Bodhale or his Muslim disciple Sheikh Muhammad all indicated a high level of integration in the Deccan territories, in which a long history of struggle between Hindu and Muslim rulers had led the populace to develop a combined and flexible spirituality (see Rigopoulos, 1993, pp. 5–7).

The way in which Hindus and Muslims co-existed in Muslim-ruled, Hindu-majority India is perhaps without a parallel in Europe; thus comparisons can be misleading. Rather than sharing a religious heritage as Hindus and Buddhists, or in the European context Christians and Jews had done, Hinduism and Islam were strikingly different in many of their approaches to divinity, iconography and social hierarchy. Islam upheld devotion to a single God, and more controversially the *non-existence* of other deities as a central tenet, in contrast to the 'many-gods, one lord' approach that many Hindus came to adopt by the medieval period. In its heartland Islam was a rigorously iconoclastic religion, while Hinduism became increasingly image-oriented in its worship, and

embodiment-oriented in its view of divinity over the centuries. Further, even when this was not practised in particular societies, Islam championed the 'sameness' of all people in the sight of God, whereas Hindus saw religious identity as diverse and determined by contexts of birth, profession, life-stage, age, gender and other factors. Such divergent beliefs would seem to preclude agreement at a personal and social level.

Yet there has been an enormous range of mutual influence and synthesis at the theological level, situated primarily in the cultures within and surrounding Indian Sufism, Hindu bhakti and Tantra. It is clear that the theological orientations of Sufism played an enormous rôle in making Muslims open to synthesis with earlier Indian traditions, and in offering a religious perspective that could be adapted by local peoples. Nevertheless Richard Eaton has questioned 'the simplistic notion, found repeatedly in the secondary literature, of pious Sufis preaching love and equality' – the close parallel between Muslim and Hindu holy men (the *pir* and the *guru*), and their shared emphasis on poetic songs, played a part, but as Eaton shows, it was often the tribes, who were only nominally Hindu, who adopted Islam in their own way and for their own purposes (Eaton, 2000, pp. 5, 189–99). The actual experience of most people appears to have been of a community in which culture, work, trade and government were combined in a way that created little conflict, or even comment.

As India entered the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Hindus and Muslims in certain sectors of society not unduly restricted by issues of pollution, also socialized together and worked side by side. When a state changed hands, the infrastructure of economic administration was often carefully preserved (Gordon, 1999; Eaton, 2000, p. 256). Administrative agreements tended to be worked out on a localized scale, with conflicting festival dates and religious spaces negotiated between the leaders of the communities. Communities appear generally to have conceived themselves in regional or linguistic terms (Talbot, 1995), and for many, it seems that religious identities were less a matter of belief or soteriology, and more a matter of community, *jāti* or clan and social and ritual status (Laine, 1999, 310–11). Culture flowed fairly fluidly between Hindu and Muslim hands, with Muslims drawing on Sanskrit traditions of literature and aesthetics (Eaton, 1978, p. 98ff.) while Hindus reciprocated, as in the Bengali writer Rabindranath Tagore's poetic appropriation of Baul poetic styles (Dimock, 1989, pp. 70–92). In the early stages of British rule, Hindu and Muslim groups were able to oppose their long-established shared culture to the rule of the new colonial government (Sanyal, 1996, pp. 29–31).

But British colonial rule ultimately raised questions of self-governance, indigenous identity and land-rights that sharpened the tensions and rivalries that existed between some Muslim and Hindu communities. A strong rhetoric of constitutive-opposition between Hindus and Muslims developed in Indian socio-political discourse. With high- and low-caste Hindus, Sikhs, Parsis, Jains,

Buddhists, Christians and Muslims all fighting for recognition in the tense – the century leading up to Indian independence, opposition between political groups, cultural representatives and living communities has led to consequences as diverse as the political division of the Indian subcontinent, Gandhi's assassination, the cultural self-determination of Pakistan and Bangladesh, the continued unrest of Kashmir and episodic rioting ever since.

Future directions must involve new ways to chart interaction between cohabiting cultures, both positive and negative. Narratives of battle and governmental shift do not say very much about the experiences of the majority of people in different regions and different conditions. Current studies are continuing to highlight the precise conditions under which religions have both merged and opposed each other. Such research helps to reveal the little-understood processes that determine the development of religions. The examination of individual lives through memoirs, literature, clerical records and hagiography offers a fascinating view of the contexts in which different communities, within the wider setting of a society that included Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs, Parsis, Christians, tribes and other religious cultures, were able to combine at the level of people's personal and immediate everyday experience in a fruitful way.

8 Study Resources: Reading Lists, Sites and Resources

Chapter Outline

Chronology

BCE

c.30,000	Bhimbetka cave paintings
c. 4000–3000	Indo-European separates into a family of languages
c. 3000	Nomadic communities begin pastoral lifestyle
c. 2500	Settlements along the Indus Valley move towards a linked urban culture
c. 2200–2000	Harappan culture flourishes
c. 2000–1500	Indus Valley settlements decline
c. 1700–1500	***Ṛg Veda* begins to be composed in the Punjab**
c. 1200–900	***Ṛg Veda* Book 10, *Yajur Veda*, Sāma *Veda* and *Atharva Veda* composed, possibly between the Ganges and Yāmuna rivers**
c. 1000	City of Kaushambi is founded
c. 900	City of Kashi (Varanasi) is founded further down the Gangetic Valley
c. 800–500	***Brāhmaṇas*, *Āraṇyakas* and *Śrauta Sūtras* composed**

c. 500	Pataliputra is founded
c. 600–400	**Early Upaniṣads composed**
	Vardhamana Mahāvīra, founder of Jainism lives
c. 500–400	Siddhartha Gautama, founder of Buddhism lives
c. 400–100	**Later Upaniṣads composed**
	First evidence of writing in Ganges Valley
327–325	Alexander the Great invades northwest India
324–181	Chandragupta founds the Mauryan dynasty; Mauryan Empire reigns
300	***Gṛhya Sūtras* composed**
300–100	***Dharma Sūtras* composed**
c. 300	Pandya, Chola and Chera kings
265–232	Aśoka Maurya reigns
135	Mauryan dynasty ends
135–73	Shunga dynasty founded by Pushyamitra
166 BCE–78 CE	Greeks, Persians and Bactrians in northwest India
300 BCE–300 CE	**Main phase of *Mahābhārata* composition**
200 BCE–200 CE	**Main phase of *Rāmāyaṇa* composition**

CE

78–230	Kushana Dynasty
c. 100	***Caṅkam* poetry composed**
	***Dharma Śāstra* composed**
150	First Sanskrit inscription produced by Rudradaman
200	***Artha Śāstra* composed by Kauṭilya**
300	***Kama Sūtra* composed by Vatsyāyana**
320–550	Gupta dynasty
350–750	**Main phase of Purāṇa composition; continues to c.1200**
c. 375	Pallava dynasty founded
477	Kālidāsa dies having composed Sanskrit plays and poetry
	Ajanta caves completed
405–411	Chinese traveller Faxien visits India
c. 250–450	*Harivaṃśa* composed
550–575	**Elephanta cave of Śiva created**
c. 500–900	**Tamil Śaiva Nayannars compose devotional poetry**
c. 600–950	**Tamil Vaiṣṇava Ā̲lvārs compose devotional poetry**
c. 600	**Increased prominence of brahminical religious traditions in India, decline of Indian Buddhism**
c. 550–880	Chalukya dynasty
606–647	Harsha reigns
c. 650–800	**Early Tantras composed**
c. 650	First Muslims reach the Indus

765–775	**Ellora Śiva cave created**
c. 788–820	**Śaṅkara composes works of Advaitic (non-dual) philosophy in Kerala**
c. 800	***Tiruvacakam* composed by Manikkavacakar**
c. 880–1200	Chola empire in South India
900	**First Khajuraho temple built**
c. 975–1025	**Abhinavagupta composes works of Advaitic Śaiva philosophy and aesthetics in Kashmir**
1001	Mahmud of Ghazni enters northwest India
1021	Turkish Ghaznavid capital established at Lahore
c. 1056–1137	**Rāmānuja composes works of Viśiṣṭādvaita (Qualified Non-Dualist) philosophy in South India**
1192–1206	Persian Ghorid capital established at Delhi
c. 1200	**Jayadeva composes *Gītagovinda* in Bengal**
	Sufi orders established in North India
	Vīraśaivas compose poetry in South India
1210–1526	Delhi Sultanate
1258	**Konarak temple completed by Narasiṃhadeva**
c. 1238–1317	**Mādhva composes Dvaitic Dualist philosophy in Karnataka**
c. 1330–1565	Vijayanagar empire flourishes
c. 1398–1448	**Kabīr composes Sant devotional poetry in Uttar Pradesh**
1399	Central Asian emperor Timur destroys Delhi
1469–1539	Sikhism established by Guru Nānak in the Punjab
c. 1486–1533	**Caitanya lives in Bengal. Gosvāmi family goes on to establish Kṛṣṇa devotional sect in Vrndavan region**
1498–1597	**Mirabai lives in Rajasthan and inspires Kṛṣṇaite devotional admiration, and composes devotional songs to Kṛṣṇa**
1526	Mughal empire established by Babur
1556–1605	Akbar reigns
1600	Elizabeth I charters the East India Company
1605	Jesuit missionary Roberto de Nobili arrives in Goa
1532–1623	**Tulsīdās composes his epic accounts of Rāma and Hanumān in Uttar Pradesh**
1608–1649	**Tukārām composes Vaiṣṇava devotional poetry in Maharashtra**
1757	East India Company defeats Muslim rulers in Bengal, initiating British Raj
1828	**Rammohan Roy establishes Brahmo Samāj movement**
1875	**Dayananda Sarasvatī establishes Ārya Samāj**
1858	Government by British Vicery officially East India Company

1863–1902	**Swami Vivekananda lives, and inspires Western interest in 'Vedānta' at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893**
1919	Amritsar massacre
1925	Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sangh founded by K. B. Hedgewar
1947	Indian partition and independence
1869–1948	**M. K. Gandhi establishes movements aimed at Indian independence and spiritual living, influencing global views of Hinduism**
1872–1950	**Aurobindo Ghose is educated in Cambridge and returns to India to become a nationalist and neo-Vedāntic thinker**
1896–1977	**A. C. Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupada lives and establishes the International Society of Krishna Consciousness**
1918–2008	**Maharishi Mahesh Yogi lives and establishes Transcendental Meditation**
1931–1990	**Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, known as Osho, lives**
1980	Bharatiya Janata Party established
1992	Ayodhya riots over the fate of the Babri Masjid mosque, believed by some to stand on the birthplace of Rāma

Online Dictionaries

The **University of Chicago's digital Dictionaries of South Asia** project offers a range of searchable dictionaries available including Sanskrit, Bengali, Hindi, Punjabi, Rajasthani, Sindhi, Oriya, Marathi, Nepali, Kashmiri, Assamese, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, and promising Kannada, Malayalam, Gujarati and other languages. http://dsal.uchicago.edu/dictionaries/

The **Cologne Digital Sanskrit Lexicon** offers an online version of the Monier Williams Sanskrit dictionary that is easily searchable once one has mastered the way in which Sanskrit diacritics are represented in the plain text format. http://webapps.uni-koeln.de/tamil

A **Gujarati lexicon** is also available at the following site. http://www.gujaratilexicon com/

Text-Archives

The Digital South Asia Library, based at the University of Chicago, provides texts, images, bibliographies and statistics. http://dsal.uchicago.edu/

Electronic Resources for Hindi and other South Asian Languages based at the University of Osaka, offering both Hindi texts and recordings. http://hin.osaka-gaidai.ac.jp/

Indology site offering a range of resources including links to e-text archives, discussion forums, http://indology.info/etexts

Hindu texts in translation: '**Sacred Texts'** offers a wide range of key religious texts in older translations. http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/

The **Gottingen Register of Electronic Texts** in Indian Languages (GRETIL) contains a large number of downloadable Hindu texts in a range of different fonts and formats. http://www.sub.uni-goettingen.de/ebene_1/fiindolo/gretil.htm

The Gauḍiya Grantha Mandira website offers a number of fonts and transliteration software, and transliterations of bhakti, Vaiṣṇava and aesthetics texts that are relevant to the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava sampradāya: http://www.grantha-mandira.com

A '**Gita Supersite'** created by the Institute of Technology, Kanpur University, which allows visitors to view two *Bhagavad Gītā*-related original or translation texts in parallel. Some translations are rather outdated, but the facility to view commentaries by major Vedāntic thinkers such as Abhinavagupta, Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, Vallabha and Mādhva in parallel with the original text is extremely useful. http://www.gītāsupersite.iitk.ac.in/index.htm

The **Muktabodha Research Institute** offers a searchable digital library of mainly Tantric and Yoga-related texts and some other resources. http://www.muktabodha.org/

The **Sanskrit Library** site provides both digitized Sanskrit texts and educational materials to facilitate their use. http://sanskritlibrary.org/

Websites and Educational Resources

Indology: Resources for Indological Scholarship, is an extremely useful source for texts, sites, links to publications, centres and projects. http://indology.info/

The **Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies** site offers full lecture series, seminars and conference handouts free for download online. http://www.ochs.org.uk

SOAS Research Online offers free access to an enormous reserve of past papers and texts authored by its members. https://eprints.soas.ac.uk/

The **Centre for Tantric Studies** provides not only Saiva and Buddhist e-texts, but also handouts and bibliographies from conferences. http://www.Tantric-studies.org/

The **Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts** has a website full of arts and archaeological resources, including images and texts, audio recordings and videos of performances and sites. http://ignca.nic.in/

Tasveer Ghar is a site that houses visual essays on a wide range of topics relating to Indian history and culture. http://www.tasveerghar.net/index.html

Associations

The British Association for South Asian Studies
Royal Asiatic Society
École Francaise d'Extreme Orient
South Asian Studies Association
International Institute for South Asian Studies
European Association for South Asian Studies
European Network for Contemporary Academic Research on India
Society for Indian Philosophy and Religion

Journals

Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/revue/befeo

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Tantric Studies Journal. A recent journal publishing articles on South Asian Tantric traditions. http://www.Tantric-studies.org/journal/

International Journal of Hindu Studies (Brill). A well-established journal that has published articles on a full range of Hindu traditions for some time. http://www.springer.com/social+sciences/religious+studies/journal/11407

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Journal of South Asia Women Studies. An online scholarly journal publishing articles on a range of gender-related issues http://asiatica.org/jsaws/

Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies. A journal featuring work by Indological scholars and comparativists, as well as Christian theologians interested in Hinduism. http://www.hcstudies.org/jrnl.html

Journal of Indian Philosophy and Religion. A print-only journal founded by the Society for Indian Philosophy and Religion. http://legacy.lclark.edu/~sipr/journal.html

Reading Lists: By Subject

Introductory chapters are listed together at the top of each section, and further reading is listed alphabetically beneath.

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Index